

# LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1348.—VOL. LII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 2, 1889.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ROY AND THE DUCHESS FACE TO FACE—BITTER MEMORIES!]

## ROY'S INHERITANCE.

### CHAPTER I.

DISINHERITED! Is there a more uncomfortable word in the English language?—one more mournful, more far-reaching in its consequences?—one more calculated to embitter the sweetest nature, or sadden the brightest of lives?

Captain Roy Falconer pulled his golden moustache as if he would like to tug it out by the roots, as he crushed his grandfather's letter in his strong right hand.

He did not blame the old man overmuch, for he knew that an enemy had done this thing—the enemy who wished to stand in his shoes; the enemy who had long coveted the broad lands of Mount Falcon, and longed to leave the young heir with nothing but a barren title to bless himself with. And now it seemed as if the long-deferred success had crowned his efforts at last, after years of patient endeavour, of deep-laid plans, and skilful manoeuvres, worthy of a far different

object, the heir was ousted, and anybody on whom Lord Mount Falcon's capricious fancy should fall, might be the happy possessor of a fortune that a duke might envy.

Roy's face grew sad as he thought of the girl whom he had asked to be his wife. He must write to her and tell her that all was at an end, for he could not ask Lady Marion Hawkshaw to leave her luxurious home and be the wife of a young officer who had only a thousand a year besides his pay. Poverty would not rob him of a single friend who was worthy of the name, but a sure presentiment told him that it would deprive him of his promised wife.

And yet, hoping against hope, he wrote the letter, in which he told her that she was free. How gladly would he welcome her if she had only her sweet self to give him; but he could not drag her down, he could not ask her to wear cambric instead of satins and velvets, he could not ask her to walk on her dainty feet, instead of driving in carriages, or riding on a thoroughbred.

But, surely, for love's sake many a woman has given up more than this!

He posted the letter with his own hands, addressed to Dunally Castle, in Scotland, where Lady Marion happened to be staying with a large party of friends; and then, in a pronounced fit of the blues, sauntered down to Tattersalls to arrange for the sale of some of his horses. He must raise money somehow, and this was the only way that occurred to him, for too often already he had been to the Jews, and suffered a marked increase in his liabilities, with but a small result to his pocket.

Blackbird, who had carried him so well across country, must be the first to go, because he was so certain to fetch a capital price. Several friends would be only too glad to get him at any figure; and for the future his owner must guide his life by practical considerations, and not at all by his own wishes. It was a bitter pill to part with his favourite, but his debts of honour must be paid at all costs, and it was no use to haggle about the way of doing it.

If only Marion would be true to him! If only she would stick by him, he felt he could bear anything else! She loved him; he could

scarcely doubt that, when her proud head drooped on his shoulder, and his happy lips met hers in that first, fond, quivering kiss of betrothal. Yes, she loved him! but would her love bear the test—the cruel test of poverty? Could she give up anything and everything for his sake? Would he be as dear to her in his poverty as he had been in his prosperity—would she tell him that money was a mere trifle compared with her love for him?

The answer came by return of post on a sheet of paper, thick as vellum, with a highly ornate monogram in the corner.

"Dunelly Castle, Perthshire.

"July 22nd.

"DEAREST ROY,—I'm the most miserable girl on earth, but what can I say but good-bye? We are neither of us fitted for bread and cheese in a cottage. We should both run a race as to which throat should be cut first. Marry an heiress (how I shall hate her), but keep a corner in your heart for your devoted, MARION.

"P.S.—If this life were only an idyll, how intensely happy you and I might still be! Good-bye!"

The letter was dashed on the ground, and crushed under the heel of his boot; whilst Roy's eyes flashed fire.

"So much for a woman's love!" he said in bitter scorn, as he tore her lovely photograph from the jewelled frame, and tearing it into fifty fragments, threw the bits of card-board into the fender.

All the youth and brightness seemed to go out of his handsome young face, as he cast his arms on the marble shelf, and buried them in his coat sleeves.

He had borne the loss of all his fortune with a soldier's power of endurance, but this was too much for him.

Good heaven! how he had loved her! What a thundering idyll he must have been! He had fanated her the sweetest woman on earth, and she was only like all the rest—swayed by self-interest, her love measured out in due proportion to a man's balance at his bankers, sinking to zero when that balance was nil.

He cursed her faithlessness, and cast her out of his heart. His pride helped him, and his utter loathing of the girl's meanness. His love died at one blow, and his happiness as well.

His laugh grew rare, but his frowns more frequent, and yet he hid his sorrows completely, even from the sharp eyes of his brother officers; and the acquaintances and friends he was always meeting at his club found him just as "good a fellow" as ever.

There was an exciting contest over poor Blackbird, for he had long been an object of admiration to most of Falconer's friends. He was knocked down at last to a man whom nobody knew; but Roy was diagnosed to find that he was acting as agent for Lady Marion Hawkshaw.

She wrote him a touching epistle, which sent him into a fearful rage.

"Why didn't you come to Dunelly? I was longing to have a talk with you. There is no reason why we should not be the best and dearest of friends, though, alas, we can never be anything more. Come and see Blackbird if you won't come and see me. I was determined to have him, dear old brute! but the price was tremendous, and blue ruin stares me in the face.—Your own, MARION.

"P.S.—You won't know me when you see me. I am worn to a shadow—a walking skeleton."

Roy sat down at once, and wrote the answer, without waiting for his anger to cool,—

"DEAR LADY MARION.—No friendship is possible between you and me. I must have something more, or something less—for my

feelings are not managed so easily as yours. If Blackbird was too expensive, pray don't keep him another hour. I knew a man who would be positively glad to have him. Let me know, and I'll drop him a line.—Yours, very truly, ROY FALCONER."

After this the correspondence ceased, and when he was deer-stalking in Scotland he was not at all surprised to hear that the last bit of gossip at Lord Clavering's shooting-box was the engagement of Lady Marion Hawkshaw to the Duke of Honiton.

"I wish him joy," he said to himself, as he paced up and down his room; but he did not utter a word against her in the hearing of anybody else.

"You've heard the news?" said Lord Clavering, doubtfully, with a side-long glance at Captain Falconer's stern face.

"Yes, Honiton's a lucky fellow!" he answered, quietly. "I always thought her out and out the prettiest girl in London."

"Good to look at; but no depth—a woman who would drive me into a madhouse before the year was out."

"I wonder why"—looking out of the window over the moors, where a steady rain was taking all colour out of the purple heather—"Beauty goes a long way? And I never saw her out of temper."

"I daresay, not," drily. "Ask her own people; I expect they would tell a different tale. But look here, Falconer, I want you to promise me a fortnight at Christmas. We shall have some nice fellows in the house, and we'll give you some good sport with the hounds. Don't go and pledge yourself to any one else; or my wife will never forgive you."

Roy promised readily enough, for Clavering Chase seemed more like home to him than any other spot in the world, since the doors of Mount Falcon had been closed against him; and he little knew what strange effect upon his life the keeping of that promise would produce.

Lady Clavering was a good-looking woman, who found life as pleasant as a summer's day. Being so content with her husband, her children, and her life in general, she was possessed with an eager anxiety to make everyone as happy as herself.

Roy was an especial favourite, partly because, womanlike, she loved a handsome face, partly because her little golden-haired Rose had singled him out as an object for her exclusive attention whenever he was under the same roof as herself.

At present she was racking her brains to find him an heiress, who should possess every charm under the sun besides an enormous fortune. But as she ran over the list she had made out, she sighed so audibly that Captain Falconer asked her what was the matter.

"Why is it that all the ugly girls are so rich, and the pretty ones so poor?" stroking her own pretty lips with the jewelled head of her pencil.

"I don't think it's true," with a smile; "but if it were it would be a very good thing. To be poor and plain is rather rough on a girl, when you come to think of it."

"It's all the men's fault!" with a pout. "You won't have anything to say to a girl unless she has a pretty face; and yet what does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. If you were furnishing a house, nothing would induce you to buy an ugly table, so why should a man saddle himself with an ugly wife?"

"How tiresome you are, when I've just thought of Lady Clara Bonnet! She will have the whole of her mother's fortune!"

"Glad to hear it. It may console her for red curls and freckles."

"Do you know, Captain Falconer," looking preternaturally solemn, "it is wicked of you to talk like that? How can the poor girl help it?"

"She can't, I could take my oath, or she would have helped it long ago."

"She's as good as gold; and I shall ask her to Clavering for Christmas."

"Do, and I'll promise not to flirt with her."

"But you must—I positively insist upon it!"

"Lady Clavering, haven't you always lectured me on my unhappy propensity?"

"Never mind. You may indulge it with Lady Clara to your heart's content."

"It would be a penance, not an indulgence—and besides, she would not allow it."

"Wouldn't she?" looking up into his handsome face with frank admiration in her blue eyes. "Captain Falconer, you are that rarest of all specimens—a modest man!"

"Then I deserve a prize," with a mischievous smile, "and it shan't be the plainest girl in the Row."

"You are a goose. She's one in a thousand!"

"Then I can't pretend to be worthy of her; and I'm sure Rose would object."

"If Rose were twelve years older—"

"Don't you think I might wait—there's no hurry?"

"There is. I know what you'll be doing. You'll be going off to that horrid India, and come back with an enlarged liver and no complexion!—and she'll throw down her pencil with a frown."

## CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS EVE put on a garment of snow, the sun touched that garment with gold, and turned every spider's web into a roof of diamonds. It was a day to make the old feel ten years younger, and the young feel as if quicksilver were coursing through their veins.

Eleanor Macdonell, the ward of the grave Mr. Prinsep, had been disporting herself like a mad schoolboy; and now flinging a snowball at Jack Prinsep's back, she rushed into the house by the back door, and straight into the cloak-room.

Down went the tray the cook was carrying with a crash that resounded through the house, as all the doors which ought to have been shut were wide open. Mrs. Prinsep came hurrying out of the drawing-room, with her cap all awry, and her fair forehead puckered into a portentous frown.

"What is the meaning of this?" her eyes fixed on the broken fragments of a mince-pie and a distorted plum-pudding. "This is you doing, Nora; I'm sure of it, and I've a great mind to say you shan't go to the Chase to-night!"

"I didn't mean to do it—indeed, I didn't!" raising her large violet eyes imploringly.

"No, that I'm sure she didn't, poor dear!" said Mrs. Forest, going down on her plump knees; "but she caught me all on a sudden. Young people go by electric telegraph now-a-days!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Go to the schoolroom at once, and, for goodness sake make yourself look more decent. I don't think Lady Clavering would have asked you to her house if she could see you now. I'm quite tired of speaking to you."

"Jack will be waiting for me. Mayn't I go and tell him that I can't come?" timidly.

"No; let him wait," severely. "Really, Eleanor, I wish you would remember that you are a young lady, and not a schoolboy. You've actually been out again without any gloves on!"

"I couldn't have snowballed properly with gloves on. There, I think everything's picked up now," to the cook, whom she had been eagerly helping. "If there aren't enough mince-pies for dinner, I'll go without!"

"Bless your heart, my dear; there's more than a score of them in the larder!"

"It would be a very proper punishment for Miss Macdonell if she did go without," said Mrs. Prinsep, gravely; "but I don't suppose it would have any effect on her. I know I might just as well talk to the wind."



"Don't you be disheartened, ma'am," said the cook, consolingly. "I've known the wildest young rips grow up into the modellest of young ladies. And Miss Nora's not got a bit of harm in her. She's a bit wild; but I was that myself before my figure grew stout, and my legs refused to hurry. I'll give this pie to Henry. Nothing comes amiss to boys, and it will save a better one."

Nora had hurried away before this, and was now hanging out of the schoolroom window, making frantic signals to her cousin Jack, when the door was flung open by Mary Prinsep—a fair girl with straight, regular features, and colourless complexion.

"Good gracious, shut that window! Do you want to go to the Chase with a red nose?"

"Never mind my nose!" promptly drawing in her dishevelled head. "If I could only feel certain that I should dance decently. Fancy, if I have to sit by aunt's side all the evening, and nobody asks me to dance!"

"There'll be Jack. He will be better than nothing."

"But he swears he won't ask me. He wants something new!"

"Nonsense! I'll get mother to tell him, and, besides, Lady Claverling is sure to introduce somebody, and then he must ask you," cheerfully, "whether he likes you or not."

Nora was not as much cheered by this prospect as she was meant to be; but her spirits rose as she put on the simple white tulle, which Mrs. Prinsep had caused to be made for her niece by the village dressmaker.

Miss Atkins had been so elated by the task conferred on her that she had spared no pains, and the white satin bodice fitted the young supple figure as if it had grown on it, and showed off every rounded line to perfection.

Jack was too young to think of presenting his cousin with a bouquet; but when his slight eyes widened with astonished admiration, as he beheld her for the first time in "war paint and feathers," as he called it, he was vaguely conscious of a wish to rush off to the greenhouse and get her a flower.

"It was a horrid shame," he thought, "that his sisters should have grand bouquets from Covent Garden, and his cousin not so much as a bunch of violets; but never mind," he whispered in her ear, "you beat them both into fits."

Nora kept pinching her fingers to keep herself from screaming with delight, when she found herself squeezed into a corner of the covered wagonette, positively on her way to the ball at the Chase.

Lady Claverling was a darling to have asked her, and some day she hoped to be able to show her the intense gratitude with which her eager heart was overflowing.

She drew a deep breath and stole a look at Jack, who, for once in his life, looked as solemn as a judge when they drove up under the marble-pillared portico, and the large doors were flung open to receive them.

Her heart beat fast, and a sort of terror came over her as she followed meekly behind her aunt's long train and her cousin's gorgeous yellow satins.

Jack wouldn't take the smallest notice of her, he was so occupied in pulling up his collars, and trying to look grown-up.

She scarcely had the courage to raise her eyes as they passed through the stately hall, and on through one beautiful room after another till they reached a blaze of light, and found themselves, amongst the crowd at the door of the ball-room.

Lady Claverling, looking like a fairy goddess, with diamonds sparkling like a thousand stars in her golden hair, on her plump, white neck, and the well-fitting bodice of her sapphire-velvet dress, came forward to meet her country neighbours with her most gracious smile.

Nora felt horribly disappointed, as the countess shook hands with Mrs. Prinsep and her two daughters and never saw the small white figure behind them.

Mary and Jane went off with two old friends

who claimed them as partners; even Jack was introduced to a tall young lady, who looked over his head as they took their first turn round the room, and there was nothing left for her to do but to take her place by Mrs. Prinsep's side against the wall.

A dismal foreboding came over her, that as it had begun so it would go on till the bitter end, and she was passionately wishing herself back in the shabby school-room at the Firs, when her aunt dropped her fan.

"My fan! my fan! Pick it up quick, or it will be broken," said Mrs. Prinsep, hastily.

"Where? where?" said Nora, eagerly, putting her foot on one of the delicate ivory stems in all unconsciousness, and breaking it in a thousand pieces.

"Oh, you dreadful girl! You've broken it! I never did know any one so hopelessly awkward as you are. Don't touch it!" as Nora stooped to pick it up, "you'll only break it again. I wish I had never brought you!"

The ready tears came into the large violet eyes. The pretty mouth quivered. The next moment she might have disgraced herself completely by crying in a ball-room, when Lady Claverling's pleasant voice made a fortunate interruption.

"Nora, will you let me introduce you to my old friend, Captain Falconer? Captain Falconer—Miss Maconald! Mind you treat him well!"

Nora pulled herself together as well as she could, and bowed her bright young head, and before she realized the position, she found herself dancing with the handsomest man in the room.

Oh! she only hoped Jack could see her, as she gave her whole mind to the execution of her steps, and found that her small feet were flying round in perfect unison with her partner's.

Oh! the delight of that first dance into the world of life, and light, and romance! Nothing would ever equal it again in the freshness of its pleasure, and it was with a long-drawn sigh that she heard the last chords of the waltz, as Captain Falconer came to a stand still in the recess of a large bow-window.

"Rather nice, wasn't it?" he said with a smile.

"Oh perfect!" looking up into his face with glowing eyes, "but I'm so sorry it's over."

"Don't be too sorry, perhaps you will dance with me again."

"If you really don't mind," with a humility that was as unexpected as it was amusing. "But I know I don't dance half well enough?"

"Your dancing's perfection. You were receiving a scolding when I first came up, if I'm not mistaken?" looking down into her eyes in a way that bewildered her.

"Yes. I was so glad to see you!" with heartfelt gratitude.

"Only because of the scolding?"

"No; I felt as if I'd give my eyes to dance with any one."

"Then any one would do as well?"

"Not quite as well as you," shyly, with crimson cheeks.

"This is your first dance, isn't it?"

"Yes. Lady Claverling said I was to come. Wasn't it good of her?"

"Not at all. She must have been too glad to get you. If this is your first dance, I'm your first friend, and you must treat me accordingly."

"What do you mean?" looking up at him with startled eyes.

"A little later on I will tell you. Do you see that man opposite you? That is my uncle. He will presently be introduced to you. He will ask you to dance; but you mustn't like him as much as me."

Nora looked across the room, and saw a gentleman-looking man, with a pale, refined face.

His cold, grey eyes were fixed on her with a

cynical stare, which made her shiver involuntarily.

"I promise you I won't," she said, quickly. "Not yet; but some day, perhaps? He wants to cut me out with everything, why not with you?" some bitterness in his voice, which aroused her sympathy at once.

"He never—never shall!" her heart beating fast, though she didn't know why.

"Isn't it money that rules the world? Supposing he were ten times richer than I?"

"Do you think I care about money?" with supreme disdain. "I should like you best if you came out of a workhouse!"

He threw back his head with a short laugh. "Bravo! I owe you something for that!"

"No, no! Don't talk nonsense!" blushing vividly. "It can't matter to you the least in the world! How could it?"

"Ah! how could it?" with a smile.

## CHAPTER III.

LATER in the evening Nora Maconald came to grief when dancing a wild gallop with Jack.

Yards of white tulle were streaming behind her on the floor, and Mary Prinsep, just saving herself from a heavy fall over it, turned upon her angrily, and told her to go and be tidied at once.

"You must take me to the cloak-room. Now do, Jack, without waiting for anything dreadful to happen!" she implored.

But Jack was shy of making his way through the throng of people in the doorway, and only answered roughly,—

"Oh, blow it! Pin it up, Nora, now. We can't lose the rest of this dance. You'd throw me over when we came back."

"Come with me!" and the next moment her small hand was resting on Captain Falconer's arm, and Jack looking after them, with the unreasoning jealousy of youth stirring for the first time in his boyish heart.

Going through the doorway, they came face to face with the Duchess of Honiton, and her large, dark eyes looked straight into Roy Falconer's.

Her face went as white as the velvet of her dress, but his eyes looked sternly into hers as he gave a slight bend of his head, and he showed not the slightest sign of emotion.

"What a beautiful face!" exclaimed Nora, looking over her shoulder in breathless admiration.

"Yes. A lovely mask—nothing more!"

There was something in his tone which seemed to chill her, and they walked on in silence.

He took her to the cloak-room, and told one of the maids to look after her, then went back to wait for her in the smoking room, the door of which he had pointed out to her on their way.

The room was empty, and rather rejoicing in the quiet, he drew an armchair close to the fire, and threw himself into it with a sigh. Clasping his hands behind his head, he fixed his eyes on the blazing coals, and saw a picture of the past rise promptly before his mental vision.

A girl was standing beside him in a Highland glen, and looking up at him with a glorious smile whilst he fastened a sprig of white heather in the front of her close-fitting jacket.

"You will keep it?"

"Till death."

Ah, me! and she had cast him off; and where was the flower now?

"Roy, why won't you speak to me?" He started to his feet and saw her standing before him in her diamonds and velvet.

"Because I haven't much to say to the Duchess of Honiton," he said coldly.

"Then think of me as Marion—nothing else," her hands clasped, her tall figure shaking from head to foot.

"Excuse me, that is impossible. You've

raised a barrier between us, and I've no wish to pull it down," his eyes flashing scornfully.

"How could I help it? Oh, if you only knew what it cost me!"

"Not much, I fancy!" crossing his arms. "Don't be so brutally bitter! You know that I was never reared for poverty. I could not have lived on a pittance. Roy"—looking up into his stern face with the utmost tenderness in her dark eyes—"don't let us quarrel about it—say that you will be my friend!"

He shook his close-cropped head.

"No; I'd have forfeited every farthing I possess to be Marion Hawkshaw's husband; but nothing on earth shall induce me to be near Grace's plaything," with a scornful bow.

"Just as you please, Captain Falconer," drawing herself up haughtily. "It is nothing to me," with a short laugh which had no mirth in it. "Only I did not wish to turn my back on a man who was down."

There was insufferable bitterness in her tone, and the words stung him to the quick.

"By Heaven! I couldn't have believed it of you!" he cried, scornfully. "After the way you have treated me, you have the face to talk like this!"

"Captain Falconer!" said a soft voice, and he turned at once with a smile towards the door, on the threshold of which Nora stood—a timid little figure in pure white, with the light shining on her sun-bright hair.

The Duchess looked from one to the other, and laughed insolently.

"You were wise to be off with the old love before you were on with the new. I leave you to innocence in white muslin!"

Then she passed by Nora, giving her a cold stare from head to foot, and swept out of the room with the air of an offended queen.

"Why was that lady so angry with me?" Nora asked, with flushed cheeks.

"Shall I tell you?" shutting the door, and then drawing her down by his side on the sofa close to the fire. "She was but a child," he told himself, as he leant his arm wearily on the cushioned back, and looked down into the pure, sweet face upturned so frankly to his own; but he forgot that what was amusement for an hour to him might be the spoiling of a whole life to her. "Do you know you've been good to a fellow who is down on his luck, and that's a very bad policy? Would you have danced with me so often if he had known that my grandfather had disinherited me? and that I hadn't a penny to bless myself with?"

"Oh, is it true?" her blue eyes full of the utmost tenderness, as she looked up into his, which were somewhat perilously near her own.

"Quite true," with a smile at her intense earnestness. "Mount Falcon goes to whomsoever the old man chooses, and I'm a beggar."

"It's a wicked shame!" she exclaimed, hotly; "but the old man will be sorry, and ask you to come back."

"He isn't the sort to be sorry. Now tell me, child," looking as if he would read her very soul, "supposing you had ever liked me enough to say that you would marry me, would you have shut the door in my face when you discovered I was a pauper?"

"Not unless I meant to sit on the doorstep," with a small smile, but a voice that was slightly unsteady.

"Good child!" he said, softly, and the young heart throbbed with a pleasure that was almost pain.

There was a silence, during which it might be truly said that the beating of her own heart was the only sound she heard, whilst Roy's thoughts went travelling far away from the little girl by his side to the irrevocable past. He was quite startled when she exclaimed, with passionate emphasis,—

"Oh if I could only get it back for you!"

"What's back?"

"That grand place you were talking of."

"I haven't a doubt that you would if you could. But as you can't," with a smile,

"could you make up your mind to be a pauper's friend?"

"Will you let me?" her long lashes drooping on her velvet cheeks in sudden shyness.

"Only too proud, if you'll be true," stooping over her, with a sudden longing to touch her pretty lips, which he checked at once, as she drew back in startled wonder, a flood of crimson rising over her cream-white neck.

"What will you give me as a pledge?"

She tore off a white satin knot of ribbon from the side of her dress, and thrust it into his hand without raising her eyes.

"Thanks!" raising it to his lips. "This shall go down to the grave with me."

"Oh, why do you talk nonsense?" she cried, passionately. "It makes me miserable when you laugh at me," a tear trembling on her silken lashes, her lips quivering.

"Nothing was further from my thoughts," gravely, and drawing her closer to his side he kissed the golden-brown curls. "Now, mind, after this I claim you as a friend for ever."

"For ever!" she answered deep down in her heart, but her lips spoke never a word.

"We must be off. There would be a fearful rumour if you and I were discovered in the smoking-room. Why, child, you are shaking! Are you cold?" he exclaimed, with surprise.

"It's nothing, nothing," she said, hastily, feeling as if she had been roused from a dream, as she stood up and unfurled her fan.

They went back to the ball-room, and Lady Claverling was delighted to see the Duchess looking on with jealous eyes at the seemingly prolonged flirtation between Captain Falconer and Mr. Prinsep's ward.

Jack was as angry as possible, and pressed his claims so vehemently that Roy graciously allowed his favourite partner to give him one solitary gallop, whilst he went to have a chat with an old friend. But Nora was tongue-tied, and he soon told her with boyish frankness that she was as stupid as an owl.

Just as she had sat down declaring that she would not dance another step with him after that, up came Lady Claverling with the man whom Captain Falconer had called his enemy in tow.

She introduced him as Mr. Philip Falconer, and Nora, in spite of her inward repugnance, had not the courage to refuse when he asked to be allowed a few minutes' conversation in the library.

She cast an appealing glance over her shoulder at Roy as he lounged against the wall by the side of a man with a pleasant face, but he only answered her look with a frown, which took her by surprise, and made her feel guilty of a crime.

Anyhow, she need not stay long with Mr. Falconer, and as soon as he let her go she would make her peace with her friend. Her heart leapt with joy at the thought that he was her friend, and she felt it as proud a distinction as if she had been elected to the Star of India.

A long time passed, and Lady Claverling hovered uneasily outside the closed door of the library.

"Oh, Roy, I'm in such a fright!" she said, as he came up to her and asked her why she was perambulating the hall. "That horrid man has got your little Nora, and I want you to go in and bring her out."

"Not I," shrugging his shoulders. "She chose to go with him."

"But do you know what he wants? Oh, if I might only tell you!—but I've given my word of honour not to tell."

"I don't know, and I don't care. Philip Falconer is no more to me than that door-handle!" looking sterner than most of H. M.'s judges.

"I wish to goodness it would turn. There's the Prinsep's carriage. I never was so glad of anything in my life!" drawing a deep breath of relief.

Mrs. Prinsep, followed by Mary, Jane and Jack, came hurrying up, full of polite good-byes and agitated inquiries after the missing Nora; whilst Captain Falconer leant his back

against a pillar and looked as if he knew nothing about her, to Jack's supreme indignation, he having made up his mind that Roy had hidden her in some corner.

Just as Mrs. Prinsep had almost finished her farewells, the library door opened, and Nora came out with a white face and startled eyes.

Lady Claverling went up to her in a fright. "Oh, my dear child, don't let that horrid man persuade you into anything!" she said, entreatingly.

"I have promised!" was the grave answer; and then she gave one hurried look round, and ran up to Captain Falconer. "Won't you say good-bye to me?" she asked, without stretched hand and appealing eyes.

"Good-bye, Miss Macdonald," he said, quietly, as he took her small hand in his and bowed over it gravely.

It was Philip Falconer who threw her white wrap over her shoulders and put her into the carriage—it was he, and not his nephew, who received her last look and smile!

(To be continued.)

## A DESPERATE DEED.

—101—

### CHAPTER LXVIII.

"HAROLD!"

What could be wrong? She glided swiftly forward.

"Where have you been?"

He grasped her arm—glared down upon her.

"I? In the library with Mrs. Trendworth and Aunt Clara till an hour ago, when I came up to dress. Why?"

He released her so suddenly she staggered. He flung his arm across his eyes.

Was he going mad? He could have sworn to having seen her face in Ivy Tower. He had galloped home. Here was she before him. How had she compassed the distance between the Castle and the Tower faster than he could ride it? She could not! Then—had he seen her at all?

"Harold!" she cried in terror. "What is it?"

He dropped his hand. All the ruddy colour had gone away from his face, leaving it wan and excited.

"Riding past Ivy Tower less than half an hour ago I saw you at a casement. I galloped home. Here I find you!"

She retreated sharply. The terror in her glance deepened. Her lips parted. No sound came forth.

He had seen it, then! Twice had she beheld that so fearfully familiar face, the counterpart of her own. And now it had appeared to him. Ghost, wraith, disembodied spirit—what matter the weird name it bore? Nothing of earth; nothing of flesh and blood; nothing human. Was it going to haunt them both for the rest of their lives?

A bell! Ringing, silverly and divinely commonplace it resounded through the house, through their agonised silence.

Mechanically the Earl walked away to his dressing-room. But she did not move. She stood quite still where he had left her.

Her head was drooped upon her breast. Knit were the slim brows and frowning. Her fingers were clenched in straining grasp.

Such vague, horrible fears as beset her! Weird tales she remembered—tales which had made her shudder when whispered by old nurses in her youth, her childhood rather.

She recalled that ballad of Moore's about Rupert and his bride—how between the two a ghastly thing forced its way, lay, "cold-chilling by his side," and gave to him a kiss which was like—

"The smell from charnel vaults  
Or from the mouldering grave."



Would she crush them apart like that demon wife—the woman she had seen—he had seen? Oh, the horrible, horrible thought! She dug her nails into her palms. The flaming gems upon her fingers out the delicate flesh.

She bit her lip till the red blood started. But she could not banish her supernatural, her frantic fears.

It was not worth while, all her scheming, all her cunning plot—not worth while.

She wished that accursed impulse had not entered her brain that wild night last September.

If she had only not acted upon the suggestion, which must have emanated from the arch-fiend himself!

She had been safe from exposure—yes. But what matter if it had come? She was, she knew now, a lawfully-wedded wife. And Reuben Garrett knew it, too. He would never, for all his threatening, have dared to bring forward an accusation which Damyn would have hurled from the ends of the earth to disprove.

What matter if the love for which she had hungered were hers? He had been growing steadily away from her. Since Christmas night there had been a barrier between them all her woman's wiles were powerless to tear down. And now this phantom of dread had come to push him still farther from her.

Oh, no, the secret of her desperate deceit was safe! But it was not worth while. Those heartrending hours when, at her gates, her child, a waif, lay dying—all the pomp, the pride of her position would not pay for one of those moments of anguish.

"Lilian!"

She cried out.

Before her stood the Earl, in the elegance of conventional evening attire, blackest of broadcloth, most dazzling of linen.

Restrained, handsome, he was a typical English nobleman—not at all the kind of individual one would associate with uncanny apparitions and domestic tragedy.

The long, flower-fragrant table in the great dining-room was closely girdled at dinner.

The rector from the glebe, the heir-apparent to a dukedom, passing a few days in Sussex—Mrs. Trendworth and her guest, Lady Clotilde Rayne—Mr. Bariston, young Christie, Nora Dallas and a famous London author.

Too polished a host was the Earl to allow conversation to flag. He was full of courtly graciousness, of ready wit.

If an effort underlay his pleasant talk, none noticed it; in fact, an effort there was. He felt anxious to distract attention from his wife. She hardly looked pretty to-night. Her small face seemed smaller than ever, almost pinched, so pensive it was, so pale; the dark eyes were restless, eerie.

The soup had come, the fish had gone, the game was here; and all the time she had sat strangely silent, speaking only when speech was unavoidable.

Wonderingly, Lady Iva observed her. What ailed this little step-mother of hers?

A very sore heart had the girl herself. Ever since that tragedy of Christmas night life had worn a different aspect for her. No longer was it just a joyful holiday.

So fast and heavily the evidence had accumulated against that young lover of hers. Words, incidents were recalled, considered trivial at the time, of fatal importance now. The dispute—if such it could be called—between Damyn and Curzon had been magnified into a savage enmity. The light words Lionel had spoken were conclusively accepted as indicative of blood-thirstiness.

Oddly enough, so it seemed to her and to many others, the Earl had made no attempt to divert suspicion from the accused. They had been such warm and staunch friends.

To be sure, my lord, on all possible occasions, declared his conviction that the deed was the work of some midnight prowler, some common poacher—that Lionel was innocent.

Frequently he visited the prisoner. Put—

and this was the point which caused some comment—he discouraged detectives who came to him, seeking other clues than those which had landed Curzon in prison.

Could not my lord, who was so certain he was not guilty, put them on some scent in following which they might run the real fox to earth?

No, he could not then indicate. No; his answer was final. He knew nothing—nothing!

## CHAPTER LXIX.

So Iva had come to think that even her father had condemned the prisoner.

And she? Hearing the affair discussed daily, and for the greater part in a biased fashion—remembering the night at Mrs. Trendworth's, when Lionel had taken her to task for that clasp touch of Sir Geoffrey's—remembering, too, his anger when she had given Damyn a flower—and a hundred other equally insignificant things which aggregated one huge suspicion—she grew half crazy.

Had he killed him through jealousy? Oh, surely he was incapable of so cowardly a crime! But the seal caught on the dead man's coat, the black hair in his fingers, the prisoner's coolness, his refusal to reply to certain questions—how branding were all these facts!

She condemned, pitied, exonerated him by turns. She scorned herself for thinking ill of him.

A dozen times a day she tried him at the tribunal of her own heart.

Why should she care so much? He was not her betrothed husband. No pledge had existed between them. Why should she suffer day and night because of him?

Reasoning thus, pride came to her aid, and through that pride she steeled herself to hear the whole wretched business endlessly talked over, to keep unbetrayed the agony it caused her.

"Quite a tragedy you had here a few months ago."

The guest of the evening had made the remark.

My lady bowed with a cold smile.

"What makes me speak of it," continued the distinguished gentleman, hurriedly, feeling that the topic he had introduced was hardly the most tactful which could have been presented, nor in the best taste, "is the fact that I ran across Vale, the other day, in London. Used to be in the Fusiliers. Any of you know him?"

Yes, several knew him.

"Well, it seems his family and that of this young—what's his name, Carlyon? Curzon? thanks!—Curzon used to be on very friendly terms. The father of this young Curzon, it appears, did Vale a substantial kindness once upon a time. This Vale is now bound to repay. He came down to Rothlyn yesterday, has taken up his headquarters at the 'Silverdale Arms,' and there he intends to remain till after the assizes."

"What does he purpose doing?"

The Earl asked the question, lifting his glass to his lips.

Not quite steady was that handsome white hand of his.

"Doing?" His grace-to-be laid down knife and fork. "He is bound to prosecute a most vigorous inquiry, employ professional sagacity, offer rewards, leave no stone unturned to discover the real culprit. He is a rich man, a grateful man, and he is only rejoiced at an opportunity to thank the son for the friendship of the father. The young fellow is, I believe, extraordinarily inert—apparently indifferent to his fate. If there is a man in England who can save him in spite of himself, I believe that man is Francis Vale."

There was silence when he concluded. All present were interested in the tragedy, its outcome. Slowly the blue eyes of the host travelled down the brilliant table, met those of my lady. One keen, piercing, steady look—a

look which measured swords. In his, fear, contempt, shame. In hers, the wildness of a bayed, a hounded creature.

The talk, the merriment, broke out afresh. But these two were haunted by that glimpse of soul flashed from each to the other across the satin snowiness, the crested gold and silver plate, the fruits, the wines, the crochets of their own board.

"A penny for your thoughts, my lady!"

She flushed painfully at the rector's rallying words.

Had she really become so abstracted as to provoke attention?

"I was thinking," lightly uttering, to hide her confusion, the first words which came to her, "how Harold fancied he saw me—or my fetch—this evening in Ivy Tower."

Several broke into exclamations.

That queer old castle-like place!—a ruin! And did ghosts congregate there? When and why and by whom was it built?

The marquis was eager in his inquiries; he was something of an antiquary. Mrs. Trendworth had never entered it. Nora Dallas would just love to go if they were sure it was haunted!

On the whole my lady's speech aroused quite a tiny tempest of enthusiasm.

"Let us go and visit it," suggested Bariston.

"When?" asked Miss Dallas.

"There will be moonlight to-night."

"To-night, then?" proposed the prospective duke.

"Shall we, Iva?"

Lady Iva turned questioningly to the Countess.

"If you wish, dear," smilingly.

"Very well, then."

Jimmie Talbot was not present. So Christie grimaced his eye-glass into place and beamed down on Nora.

The prospect of a moonlight walk with this piquant little lady! He actually would like it himself. And how she would enjoy it!

"Ab, Miss Dallas," he whispered tenderly, "I am in ecstasy!"

Extremely serious the pretty face turned up to his.

"Then," with decision, "go and talk with Mrs. Vere."

"I—eh? Mrs.—"

"Precisely; I don't know if it was the salad which transported you—or the pate. In either case, Mrs. Vere is the only thoroughly congenial spirit to whom I can advise you to go for sympathy. She," with a little rippling laugh, "is usually ecstatic, too, at this hour."

The eye-glass tumbled down with most undignified speed.

"But I meant that the pleasurah, the chawm—"

The ladies were rising—leaving. So his explanation was nipped in the bud.

An hour later they were all out in the clear, blue moonlit night. Wrapped in rich furs and shawls, jesting and chatting, they turned away under the mighty trees which cast such flickering fantastic shadows.

With musical distinctness on the chill night air their voices rang, as swiftly they hurried on to the darksome ruin called Ivy Tower.

## CHAPTER LXX.

THERE it was!

They were warm and exhilarated from walking when they reached it.

Fair and imposing, if deserted, in daytime, it became at night a place of gloom, of loneliness, of indescribably grotesque and mysterious influence.

Against the woody background, against the blue-and-silver flooded sky, gaunt and gloomy it rose.

Had it ever been used as a place of dwelling? Did brave men meet and drink within those walls? Did lovely ladies tread beneath those massive and majestic arches?

The gay voices grew hushed as they approached.

"Come!" urged the Earl.

They went forward.

As they were about to enter, my lady drew back with a shudder.

"It is so dark!" she cried.

"Here—yes," assented the Earl. "Part of the wall has crumbled down, though, from above the first flight. There will be light there. And from the top the view is magnificent!"

This was encouragement.

They went in.

With a whirr of wings, a rush, living things flew past them. A touch, detestably soft, thick, struck the velvet of my lady's cheek.

So intensely nervous, high strung, she was to-night.

Again she recoiled with a wild cry.

Had dead fingers brushed her face?

"Only a bat, Lady Silverdale," declared the well-modulated voice of the marquis.

He offered his arm to Lady Iva.

He was beginning to consider the advisability of prolonging his stay in Sussex. Gad! the people were delightful! And this sweet and stately maiden hidden in her father's princely home, as was Fair Rosamond in her bower; surely the sleeping beauty of the laureate was not more lovely, more lofty, more altogether winsome and imperious than she!

All the young people indeed enjoyed the nocturnal visit, the glamour of the moonlight, the brisk walk, the solemnity of the place, the occasional cry and whirl of night birds, and, when a fugitive breeze came wandering that way, the creeping rustle of the ivy leaves covering the ruined tower. More than all, perhaps, the thrilling and delightful sense of warm human companionship.

Across the huge apartment of the lowest floor, evidently a banquetting hall in some far-off day, they picked their steps. Then up the winding, irregular stair, here broken, there half-blocked with crumbling stone, to the landing above.

Here, as his lordship had said, was light—a yawning, jagged gap in the wall, through which the white radiance poured in a pallid stream, and barring which a few trails of ivy swung in the riotous and fitful breeze.

"How perfectly heavenly!" murmured Christie to Nora.

But that demure damsel shook her head dissentingly.

"A great big, cold room, with a pile of fallen stone blocking off one corner, in which may lurk goodness knows how many ghosts, who, like Mr. Aldrich's, may not know their names because they 'only died last night.' It may be your idea of Heaven; it isn't mine."

"Oh, come now!" protested Randolph, seeking his eyeglass, with a vague hope that it might imbue him with mental brilliancy. "You are too hard on a fellow, don't you know. I meant the companionship, the—"

"Oh, you did?" in dismay. "Why, your taste is actually morbid? Owls and bats and all kinds of horrid things—ugh!"

Randolph growled. How preposterous she made him appear—him, Randolph Christie! "My dear Miss Dallas, I refused to the delight of your society."

The Rubens-headed head of Miss Dallas bowed appreciatively.

"Oh, thank you!"

Emboldened by her gratitude, the slave of the glass—the eyeglass—pressed a little the grey-gloved hand upon his arm.

She was very charming, and evidently impressed by him—quite badly hit, in fact. And he? Well, a fellow might do a good deal worse.

So he brought his auburn moustache—ruddied auburn it was—close to her ear.

"Oh, don't say that; I'm really in earnest. I think that you are a—most unusual girl—thead!"

"No!" in intensest astonishment. "You

flatter me too much. But I can safely return the compliment. I never saw, or imagined even, a man like you!"

Oh, this was splendid! Randolph wished he could get around and pat himself on the back. She had joined the army of his hopeless worshippers. Hopeless? Why that? Why should he not take possession of this fascinating bit of femininity? Fetching? Oh, most awfully so, by Jove!

He pressed the plump fingers a trifle more tenderly.

"Aw!" in the murmurous tones he considered irresistible. "Then may I not hope that you will honour me by a promise of this fair hand?"

But Miss Dallas withdrew suddenly the article of petition.

"Thank you again, so very much. But, as Artemus Ward so sweetly said 'It cannot be!'"

"Miss Dallas!"

They were alone now; the others had gone on upward to the flat tower roof.

"Mr. Christie!"

"Am I to consider—"

"That I must decline 'the burden of an honour unto which I was not born?' Yes."

And striving to hush the laughter which would bubble to her lips, she ran lightly up the twisting stair and joined the others.

Randolph stared blankly after her. He, for the moment, as people will in the most critical periods of life forget that which had lately been to them most prized and cherished—he forgot to produce his eyeglass.

And he uttered one emphatic word

"Confusion!"

## CHAPTER LXXI.

Up on the tower top the party stood in the silence of absolute awe.

How far they could see in the moonlight! And what a wonderful world was this which unrolled a page of its beauty at their feet!

The dense deer park billowing away to the right. To the left the winding ways, the statued, fountains, the shrubberies of Rosedene.

Beyond these the castle itself, turreted, battlemented, rising royally aloft, every buttress, every cupola, every pinnacle, distinct in the moonlight—a home of pride, of magnificence. And before them, stars in the blues, the lights of Rothlyn gleamed.

The bolder of the group went close to the edge, looked down.

How near the sky seemed! How very far below the avenue along which they had come!

A great height! They drew back, feeling nervous and dizzy.

My lady could not be urged to glance over. She shrank to the Earl's side, clung to his arm.

"You ought to feel like a prisoned princess, Lady Iva, living amid such romantic surroundings," said the Marquis.

Tall and graceful she stood beside him. A wrap of silk-lined swansdown was cast over the golden head, the straight, young shoulders. One bare hand, "warm, delicate, dimpled," held the soft folds tightly together at her throat.

And her companion thought that the "passionless, pale, cold face," out with cameo purity against the blue night sky, was the most perfect, the proudest, he had ever seen.

"I am not prisoned though," she answered.

"You have travelled on the Continent, I believe?"

"A little—yes."

"And lived in London?"

"Oh London I know almost nothing. I was to have gone up this spring, to have been presented at the May Drawing-Room. But now—"

She broke off expressively.

"This unfortunate affair of Damyn's murder prevents your doing so. How unfortu-

nate! The accused is a friend of your fathers?"

"Yes—of ours!"

A pang went through her heart. How was she proving her friendship of late? By alternate condemnation, exoneration!

If the man is innocent, it—"began the Marquis.

"If," turning to flash on him the indignation, the anger of eyes brilliant as purple diamonds in the moonlight—"there is no if! He is innocent!"

The Marquis of Lanpurfair bowed apologetically.

"I ask your pardon!"

But he drew a breath of comprehension. Did the land indeed lie in that direction? The discovery was something of a blow. But—patience!

The others were descending the stairway. They followed them.

On the floor below they lingered to inspect the curious portholes.

Between the Earl and Iva's companion an animated discussion as to the methods of warfare, ancient and modern, sprang up.

The countess slipped away from them, stood leaning by the great vent in the wall, gazing out.

Lionel had a friend. He was bound to ferret out the murderer of Sir Geoffrey.

How would it be with her if he succeeded?

And yet in her heart she hated to think of that dauntless boy in prison. The ignominy of it!

Long she stood there, half in the shadow of the wall, thinking, a dreary pain in every thought.

Suddenly the desolation, the silence, seemed to become to her positively tangible. She turned. They had all gone. They had failed to see her where she stood—had forgotten her.

She was alone at midnight in Ivy Tower. Her breath came quickly; all around she shot lightning glances.

A thousand terrifying imaginings took possession of her. Should she behold here that face like, so like her own—the face she had seen nailed down under a coffin-lid? Those wavering shadows brought to mind

"Vast forms that move fantastically  
To a discordant melody."

From behind yon barricading pile of rock might not "a hideous throng rush out?"

"Ah!"

A low cry escaped her.

Something had moved over there! Something—someone was climbing over the wall-like ledge!

She could move neither hand nor foot.

Through the checkered shine and shadow the figure swiftly came—confronted her!

## CHAPTER LXXII.

"A n-night I-like this a-always makes me remember some v-erases I wrote once."

They were out of the darksome tower now and hastening up the avenue.

"Head him off, someone!" cried the author from London.

But Bariston persisted.

"It be-began th-this way:

"B-brooding is night and a-sweet;  
The f-flowers a nod in a d-dream;  
The m-moon that climbs yon steep  
Is j-ust as f-fair as c-ream!"

A painful silence.

Then hysterical, subdued, half-explosive sounds.

The poor, little poet! But to his assistance aid came from an unexpected quarter.

"I like that," Mrs. Vere, lumbering along among them, spoke suddenly. "The last line is especially good. It is so appetizing. I always was fond of whipped cream with just a little



sugar and a spoonful of sherry or rose-water, I admire your poetry, Mr. Bariston."

There was a burst of irrepressible laughter from the others.

"Thanks!" sighed the poet, who had found at last one appreciative heart. "Thanks!"

But his voice sounded as though it had come from his boots.

Oddly enough they had not missed the Countess.

Those in the rear supposed she was ahead with the Earl and Mrs. Trendworth. They in turn presumed she was behind with the rector or Lady Iva.

"Oh, for a song!" cried the Marquis.

"Yes," seconded Nora Dallas, eagerly—"sing, Iva!"

"Do favour us!" urged the rector.

"Be generous!" implored her escort.

"No—oh, no!"

She shrank at the suggestion. Sing! and her heart so sad? While he lay in his lonely cell—and she was at times such a cruel judge, so full of scorn of him! Why, she had not sung since Christmas night, when Sir Geoffrey had paused at the doors long enough to hear her song.

Distinctly she recalled him as he waited, listening, the lamplight shining down on his blonde head, his pale, highbred face.

What had she sung? Something Mr. O'Donnell had urged her to give them. She remembered it now; but she did not know, she never would know that the refrain of that song, that alone, had brought Damyn back to Silverdale Castle that night with his planned purpose uncompleted.

How did it run:

"Oh, what was love made for if 'tis not the same  
Through joy and through torment, through glory  
and shame!

I ask not, I care not, if guilt's in that heart—  
I but know that I love thee whatever thou art!"

The simple, sincere lines! They thrilled her as might a magical invocation.

She thought of Lionel. His face seemed to grow out of the night before her—that splendid resolute face, with the firm, handsome mouth and brave, loving, brilliant eyes. She remembered his steadfastness, his innate nobility, his infinite grace of thought which blossomed into speech. And all her soul went out to him in one dumb and passionate cry, which not for a crown, not for a kingdom would she have voiced, even to herself,—

"I but know that I love thee whatever thou art!"

"Lilian!"

The Earl had stopped—called out.

"Lady Silverdale? She is not with us."

They were almost home.

"Not with you!"

A brief excuse to Mrs. Trendworth. Then the Earl dashed toward the advancing group.

"Are you certain?"

"Quite certain."

"How could it have happened?" he cried. "She will be frightened to death. We have left her alone—behind us—in Ivy Tower!"

Backward, along the path they had just traversed, he started on a run. More agile than many a younger man, he ran fleetly, without pausing.

Hot and breathless he grew; but he raced right on. A long time it took him to retrace his way, or so it seemed to him—a long time.

He strained his eyes. Might he not discern in the distance the familiar little figure?

There was no human thing in sight. Perhaps she had fainted when she found herself alone.

Compassionate, as are all strong and tender natures, he almost forgot her sin and his alienation, in the thought of her possible fear—loneliness.

At last!

He could see the great green walls ahead. He pushed on.

Reached!

He bounded up the slight elevation upon

which the Tower stood, sprang under the dusky entrance arch just as a man came rushing down the winding stair, leaped past him, almost knocking him over in his reckless haste, cleared the threshold, and sped away into the moonlight—into the darkness of the demesne!

## CHAPTER LXXIII.

Who, was he?

Pursuit would be in vain. Indeed he felt stunned.

"Lilian!"

The croaking cry. Its hoarseness startled him.

Her voice answered him from above. Her little high-heeled shoes came clicking down the bare stone steps.

A moment more and she stood beside him.

Neither broke the oppressive silence. He caught her by the arm. He hurried her out of that weird place of shadow. Without he relaxed his grasp, faced her.

"Who is he?"

"Is who, Harold?"

She tried to speak fearlessly. Her voice would not obey her will. It sounded faint and broken.

"The man who sprang past me just now."

"Harold—"

He threw his hand up with an imperious gesture.

"Take care! Do not oblige me to use brutal words to you—to tell you *you lie!*"

A harsh speech; but he was hardly himself. One suspicion piling upon another had spurred him to the verge of insanity.

She fell back.

"That threat is brutal!" she said, in a low tone.

He did not heed her.

"Listen!" he cried, "and answer! What new lever do you meet here by day—by night?"

Lover?

Yes, that was the very word. A genuine horror came into those wide, dry eyes of hers. Lover! Now may Heaven have pity on her if it had come to this between them, for no wedded wife could be more true than she in fealty to him.

Lover! How the word dazed, dismayed her! She could not speak. And he thought her silence guilt.

"Ah, you offer no denial!"

The bitter taunting words were just the last she needed.

"Denial!" she echoed, with shaking lips.

"Both your accusation and your threat preclude that!"

Pathetic in its pallor was the small face framed in by the hood of crimson-lined fur.

He was touched. He discarded his air of severe disdain.

"Tell me," almost pleadingly, "the truth."

She flung back her head. She looked him straight and full in the face.

Up the avenue she could catch the sound of voices. Others were coming to meet them.

"Have the truth, then! You are my only lover," every word stabbing the air like a stiletto, "and," more slowly still, "I wish to Heaven I had never looked upon your face!"

She wheeled around, sped away, left him standing there.

"There is the Countess!"

"Ah, Lady Silverdale!"

"Did we really desert you?"

"Did you see a ghost?"

They closed about her with merry comment, questions.

"Oh, yes," she cried, loudly—"yes, indeed, I saw a ghost! A real, live ghost—yes!"

And then she broke out in wild, hysterical sobs, in shrill, resounding, uncanny laughter.

"Little mamma!"

Iva made her way to her side.

The Earl hurried up.

But she only laughed on—laughed and cried in a breath.

"Hysteria," someone said.

They took her home; they sent for Dr. Callen.

He came. He went up to my lady's dainty room, where Iva opened the door for him. He looked very grave.

In the hall the Earl walked up and down, awaited his descent.

He came at last.

"Brain fever!" he said.

## CHAPTER LXXIV.

A clean and cosy little room. On the walls a bright, beflowered paper; on the floor a square of crimson drapery; in the iron grate a cheerful sea-coal fire—it actually *smelled* cheerful; on the one modest window a pair of snowy Swiss curtains; on the walls a few very brilliant pictures, concerning the artistic merits of which, perhaps, the less said the better.

On the round table in the centre of the apartment a clear, porcelain-shaded lamp; and by the table, in a heavy, old-fashioned chair—a gentleman.

He matched the chair; he was old-fashioned too. His clothes, of the richest of material, were obviously antiquated as to cut; his linen was ruffled; his tie was a painfully exact, big black bow, and from his massive watch-chain swung two large topaz seals.

A hale and hearty man still, Mr. Francis Vale, despite his sixty-odd years. Tall, muscular, energetic, with a clever, keen, bold-featured face. The high-bridged nose indicated character; the close-pressed lips had a sort of saturnine grimace; the deep-set eyes held a snap which bespoke their owner's quick temper, and a twinkle which belied the same; silvery hair, shaggy brows, and a still dark moustache—quite a bristling ferocious moustache—and now you have seen him.

A knock!

Mr. Vale straightened up and looked toward the door.

"Come in!"

The portal was pushed ajar.

"Ah, mine host! Bad night!"

"Mine host" advanced and set carefully down on the red table-cloth the tray he carried.

A bright silver tray it was, and it bore two tumblers which positively shone with polishing, a decanter containing a vintage of a deep golden hue, a blue china sugar-bowl, surmounted by a quaint claw tongs—also a wine glass, two spoons, a knife and a lemon.

The proprietor of the "Silverdale Arms" turned his sandy head on one side and took a silent inventory.

At least, so he presumably was doing, for his eyes never could be brought to regard together any certain object. They were strong-willed eyes, and evidently held conflicting opinions.

So just now while one glanced over the tray the other gazed upon the portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire (whom the explanatory line underneath declared it to be) which adorned the opposite wall. The double survey was evidently satisfactory, for he smiled, rubbed his hands, and looked at his guest.

"Bad, sir? Yes, sir. Hawful bad night, sir. Never was no worse, sir. Hearken to that wind, sir. Black as Rubus, too, sir."

"As what?"

"Rubus, sir!" complacently.

Mr. Francis Vale, bending toward the fire to adjust the little fat brass kettle singing thereon, turned his head.

"Erebus, you mean."

"Precisely so," assented Mr. Dock, not at all disconcerted. "I knowed it was the name of some one black."

"Oh!"

And now the twinkle in his eyes had quite eclipsed the snap.

"Hanything more, sir?"

"No. Hold on, though."

He "held on." He looked at the duchess—or, rather, the eye which seemed to especially admire the duchess looked at her (oh, poor Georgiana to be thus portrayed!); the other regarded his guest.

Those stupid detectives did not seem to be making any headway in this miserable Silverdale murder business, thought that same guest. He could do better himself, by George! He had half a mind to try. He wondered if this fat old fellow with the full moon face—harvest moon at that—the "contrary" eyes and the ruby nose, could help him out at all.

It was worth finding out.

"Davis in?"

"No, sir."

Davis was a professional from Scotland Yard especially employed on this case.

The second tumbler and second spoon were originally intended for Davis.

But Mr. Dock would no doubt be quite as appreciative.

"Sit down."

"Eh, sir?"

The rebellious eye hurriedly left the picture of Georgiana.

"I said sit down."

He had quite an imperious way about him which awed his inferiors.

Meekly Mr. Dock sat down. Deliberately the gentleman from London cut his lemon and laid a slice in his tumbler. On the lemon he just as thoughtfully deposited two cubes of sugar. From the decanter he filled the wine glass once and half again, and poured the golden liquor over the sugar. Then he took the little brass kettle from the fire, and almost filled his tumbler with the boiling water. He smelled, sipped—and smiled.

"Go ahead!"

#### CHAPTER LXXV.

Mr. Dock started up.

"Yes, sir."

"I mean make yourself a glass of toddy."

"Oh, sir!"

"Hurry up!"

With flattered alacrity mine host did as he was bidden.

"Now tell me all you know about the murder of Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

The proprietor of the inn, sitting stiffly on a slippery horse-hair chair, glass in hand, began a glib recital of the main facts of the tragedy.

"Oh, hang that rot, man! Everyone knows what everyone knows. Tell me the suspicion of the townfolks—your own suspicions. Or do you believe Curzon guilty?"

The little landlord was not timid now.

"No, sir!" he cried, emphatically.

"Ah, indeed!"

The exclamation was interestedly interrogative.

"No, sir; no more guilty than—begging your pardon, sir—than you are. Him, sir? why, he wouldn't 'arm a dog, sir! If he thought the other gentleman deserved killing, sir, he'd 'ave downed him in a fair fight—not 'ave shot him in the back, sir. When Jem Harris broke his leg, and was laid up, who supported his family till he could get round agen? Mr. Lionel, sir. When young Tommy Ginals was to be sent up for poachin', who went to the magistrates and says, 'It's his first wrong step. Give him a bit of mercy. He's only a lad.' And they did? Mr. Lionel, sir. When my poor boy was sick for months—he's gone now, sir—who'd drop in most heavy night?—and once he liked to so well, always kind and pleasant. Mr. Lionel, sir. And ye think he'd commit murder—Mr. Lionel, sir?"

The stout, prosaic innkeeper was a fervent defender. It was not the whiskey toddy which inspired him, for he had not yet drank it.

"I don't think so, my good man."

There was neither flash nor twinkle in those deeply-intrenched eyes now—just a dimness.

It spoke well for the prisoner that he had awakened such affection, such loyalty as this!

He must be his father's son, Mr. Vale decided. And he was glad he was doing his poor best to help him.

Two minutes—five—ten!

It was a nasty night without. March has a notoriously unpleasant reputation. This particular evening confirmed with a vengeance the reason for the same.

They could hear the spiteful wind snarling around the house; the rain blustering at the window.

"Have you no reason to suspect anyone else?" Vale asked, draining his glass.

Dock shook his head.

"Think again. Any suspicious characters round town? Or were there any about that time? You ought to know."

Again that negative gesture.

The other persevered.

"Anyone leave town suddenly about Christmas?"

He proceeded to cut another slice of lemon.

"Not that I know of, sir. Unless——"

He stopped.

"Unless whom?"

Mr. Dock laughed.

"Oh, he never does it either, sir. But he left kind of hasty like. He said as how he'd got a lot of money from his brother in America, and he was going there hat once."

There was a flash under Mr. Vale's shaggy brows. But he went on concocting a second supply of spiritual refreshment.

"When did you say he left?"

"Between Christmas and New Year, sir."

"What is his name?"

"Rick Pollen."

"How much money had he?"

"Fifty pounds."

"When did he receive it?"

"Christmas Day, he told the boys."

"Thank you! Good night, Mr. Dock?"

Thus dismissed, Mr. Dock finished his punch and retired.

Half an hour passed.

Then came another knock.

"Oh, come in!"

He came in—Davis.

A dapper, youngish man, with a pair of well-brushed side whiskers and a mouthful of dazzling, false teeth.

"Anything new?"

"The Countess of Silverdale is down with brain fever."

"All the worse for the countess. But we have nothing to do with her. Listen! I've been playing ferret myself to-night."

Briefly he repeated Dock's admission.

"I want you to find out all about this chap to-morrow, and to discover at the bank if he really cashed an American cheque there. Perhaps there is nothing in his abrupt departure, and there may be a good deal."

Davis bowed.

And the result of the following day's investigation was a telegram sent to "Luke Pollen, E. Taylor St., Chicago, Illinois, U.S.," and the message within ran as follows:

"Insist on your brother Rick returning to Rothlyn at once. His evidence required. All expenses paid."

(Signed) FRANCIS VALE."

(To be continued.)

WHATEVER mitigates the woes or increases the happiness of others is a just criterion of iniquity. One should not quarrel with a dog without a reason sufficient to vindicate one through all the courts of morality.

EVILS in the journey of life are like the hills which alarm travellers upon their road; they both appear great at a distance, but when we approach them we find that they are far less insurmountable than we had conceived them.

#### THE OLD-FASHIONED MOTHER.

—O—

THE old-fashioned mother—

Heaven bless her!—

How we long to embrace

And caress her,

If there's one to be found

In the country around,

With the greatest respect

We address her.

Her hair, dark or grey,

Brushed so neatly,

And framing her face in

So sweetly,

No frizzes, no puffs,

No paniers, no ruffs,

Yet acting the lady

Completely.

The sensible mother,

Whom Fashion,

Though she put her tryannical

Lash on,

Could never transform

From the being so warm

Into yon stately dame

With such dash on.

Oh, would that swift time

Might restore us

The old-fashioned mothers

That bore us,

Whose pleasant home duties

Developed rare beauties—

So unlike some mothers

Before us!

M. K.

#### EILEEN'S ROMANCE.

—S—

#### CHAPTER XIII.

It seemed to Eileen Desmond that no sorrow could be like to hers, as she stood in the dull, bleak breeze of the winter's morning, holding in her hand the poor withered flower that had once been the pledge of her happy love.

She never blamed Basil, never even in her thoughts. He had wooed her honourably, and been rejected by her father with bitter words.

There was nothing to bind him to her. She herself had told him he was free. He was only to come back when she was of age, if he loved her.

She knew, too, what strong temptations awaited him. A wealthy marriage would restore his father's position and his mother's ease, while his clinging to her meant almost ruin for those nearest to him; yet, such was the tenacity of her love, such the sublimity of her faith, that Eileen had actually believed Basil's affection would stand the test—that, though tried in the furnace, his love would not fail her.

She had been called on to make a cruel choice—been herself forced either to break her troth to Basil, or to send her father in his old age to a criminal trial; but in all her doubts and perplexities she had never dreamed that her lover himself might out the knot of her difficulties by setting her free.

The struggle was over now. No longer need her heart's love and her daughterly tenderness wage war in bitter conflict, for Basil wanted her no longer.

He had cast her aside like a worn-out glove or a broken toy, and now there was no one in the world to whom it would cause a pang if she married Henry Marsden.

She turned to go back to the house, slowly, irresolutely, for what need was there of haste? What mattered anything now, since her hopes were wrested from her, and a cloud filled her heart?

She had forgotten her father's difficulties,



forgotten her elderly admirer. She did not even remember Maude's return, and the lecture which would infallibly greet her tardy appearance at breakfast.

No; Eileen's heart was too full to think of these things. But one thought possessed her, that she and Basil Courtenay were parted for all time. That summer sunshine and winter snow would alike find them separated. They would breathe the same air, sometimes, perhaps, even meet face to face during his visits to his uncle, Lord Vivian, but as lovers, as two who hoped to take life's journey together, they would meet each other never more.

And she was eighteen—only eighteen! Why, she might have to live fifty years before life's burden could be given up.

Fifty years of loneliness, of this dull gnawing pain, or was it that as people grew old wounds smarted less, that hearts were less ready to feel pain and anguish?

Looking down the long vista of future years it seemed to Eileen the time could never come when she would forget Basil.

Her romance had had but a brief blossom. It began in the August sunshine, it was cold and dead before December, and yet, for all time, it must mark her life.

Four months ago she had never heard of Basil Courtenay, and now, though, he would be sought to her, she would go down to the grave with his name written on her heart.

And that was love!

Eileen did not regret her brief romance. Basil Courtenay had brought into her life a flood of sunshine, a joy she had never dreamed of. The sunshine was clouded over now, the joy had fled; but Eileen had their memory still. She could never again be the bright, careless child of the sordid home in Boulogne, but at least she had known love!

And Heaven was merciful. It had taken her mother from a troubled life, perhaps, too, it would set her free from all her sorrows.

She could not fancy herself growing old, could not realize a time when she should be a lonely, feeble old woman, her golden hair thin and faded, the fire of her blue eyes quenched, the lightness gone from her step.

Her mother had died of grief, and everyone said she was so like her mother. Why should she not die too? Perhaps Basil might come to her then, if, indeed, she were on her death-bed it would be no wrong to his parents, no injury to his heiress bride, that he should stand by her for a few brief moments and say good-bye.

"Miss Eileen! Miss Eileen!" broke upon the poor child's reverie, the voice coming from a fly which was rattling along the road from the station. "Just wait a moment!"

In less than that space of time the fly was stopped, and Mrs. Venn alighted as nimbly as though she had been a girl instead of a woman of eighty.

She was well wrapped up, and made a most presentable figure in her velvet bonnet and fur-lined cloak. She put her hand on Eileen's shoulder, and begged her to come into her cottage.

"It's to London I've been, my dear, and I spent the night at Whitby, for I never could bear coming home in the dark. I told the girl to have breakfast ready. Let me give you just a little, and hear the news."

It was a relief to put off the meeting with Maude, and be spared the comment on her white cheeks; so Eileen, who entertained a warm liking for the eccentric widow, accepted the invitation, and the 'girl' having obeyed her instructions, breakfast was soon forthcoming.

"I expect you are surprised to hear I've been to London," observed Mrs. Venn, quietly, "but I had a fancy to go and see a friend there!"

"I am only surprised you don't live there altogether," replied Eileen, frankly. "It must be decidedly dull for you at the Lodge, specially in the winter."

"I'm fond of quiet, and I've my work out

out for me here, little as you'd think it. I was half afraid I'd not see your bright face here again, Miss Eileen, for you seemed terribly put out with me the last time you were here."

Eileen flushed.

"I understand your meaning now," she said, sadly. "In fact, I knew it ten minutes after I left you. You were kind to try and have me, but the idea of such a thing never even occurred to me."

"And I was right?"

She had no one to sympathise with her, this poor lonely child. No one in all the world to hear her story, and bid her take courage. Mrs. Venn might be a woman of the people. Her habits might be eccentric, and her ways peculiar, but she had shown Eileen, from the moment of their meeting, that she liked her, and would fain befriend her.

The motherless girl raised her sad, weary eyes to the old woman, and said, simply,—

"Yes."

"I knew it," rejoined the widow, oracularly. "You are so like your mother. Henry Marsden worshipped the ground she trod on. It stood to reason he must care for her child!"

Eileen started.

"Do you mean he loved my mother?"

"I'll tell you the truth, my dear, if no one else will. They were engaged to be married, and but for her going to Mr. Desmond's (his lordship that is) as governess to Maude, they would have been wedded right enough. Your father fell in love with her, and she with him. Henry Marsden was sent to the right-about, and they were married!"

"Then he had something to complain of?"

"A great deal then; but don't you let that thought fret you. He took the law into his own hands, and revenged himself pretty thoroughly. He made himself your father's friend and boon companion. Noel Desmond was always weak and easily led. This Marsden drew him into every vice and extravagance. Hamburg can boast of, and at last taught him to cheat at cards, so that he was expelled from the whist club, and, as crowning stroke of all, induced him to forge his name on the back of a cheque!"

Eileen winced.

"He did it!" she breathed. "He owns that?"

"Ay, he did it!" returned Mrs. Venn, "but it was his false friend tempted him all along, Miss Eileen. He'll tell you, perhaps, your mother died of want, while your father was amusing himself. That's false. She died of a broken heart, because she could not keep her husband straight; but if it hadn't been for Henry Marsden Noel Desmond would have been a better man."

"He took a vow she should repent forsaking him, and set to work to degrade and ruin her husband. Don't you go and think Henry Marsden needs your pity. He has shown little enough to others."

"How has he become rich, pray? but as a money-lender. Prospering on the misery of the wretched creatures to whom he makes advances at fabulous interest."

"He came to Desmondville thinking to put the screw on your father. Believing for the sake of his past misdeeds being kept secret, Lord Desmond would pay handsomely for his silence. He saw you, and, as I expected, fell in love with you."

Eileen looked troubled and bewildered.

"Before he came, my father spoke of owing him a thousand pounds."

"Marsden would have taken half that for the compromising papers, and been glad," retorted Mrs. Venn. "He loves money dearly. He is so rich that he need never make another sovereign, and yet all his thoughts are on screwing larger and larger sums out of his unfortunate victims."

"I knew your mother, you see, child, and for her sake I'd be sorry if harm came to you, and I tell you frankly, you'd better be lying in your coffin than be the wife of Henry Marsden. If you'd never seen Mr. Courtenay—never

given him your promise, I should say just the same."

"But my father!"

"What of him?"

"Mr. Marsden threatens to prosecute him."

"Let him!"

"The disgrace!"

"He could do it," said Mrs. Venn, musingly, "but I don't believe he would. Marsden has a bad name already as a money-lender and extortioner. It wouldn't add to his fame to drag an old man to prison for a crime committed eighteen years ago; besides, your father never gained a penny on account of the cheque, as he could prove."

"He says the disgrace would kill him," whispered Eileen, pitifully. "Oh, Mrs. Venn, I wish I had died before Mr. Marsden ever saw me!"

"That's foolish!" was the brisk reply. "Just remember England's a free country, and girls can't be married against their will. When have you to give Mr. Marsden your answer?"

"The last day of this year!"

"Well, you've time to think over it!"

"I have thought, and I only grow more wretched. I hate the man. I shrink from him in loathing, and yet how can I send my father to a felon's fate?"

"Leave it to me," said Mrs. Venn, with a quiet air of command which inspired confidence. "Just do as I tell you, and I promise you Marsden will leave you in peace and let Lord Desmond alone!"

"Are you a magician?"

Mrs. Venn shook her head.

"I have got a head on my shoulders, and I know how to use it. You do as I tell you, and I promise to get you out of this scrape!"

"But—"

Mrs. Venn chuckled.

"You mustn't ask me any questions, and you must do everything I say, no matter how much you dislike it. I dare say I shall seem like a foolish old woman to you; but, depend upon it, I know what I am about, and Mr. Courtenay must thank me."

Eileen shook her head.

"You must put him out of the question. My father refused his suit, and—and we are strangers!"

"Which I don't believe!" returned Mrs. Venn. "You and Mr. Courtenay were made for each other. There may be a little difficulty, as his parents are desperately poor, and want him to marry money; but his heart's in the right place. He'll wait for you, and when you come into your fortune, not even Lady Constance Courtenay can find fault with her son's choice."

Eileen turned away with a sigh.

"My acquaintance with the Courtenays is over. Whoever I marry will not affect them; but, for my own sake, Mrs. Venn, I will bless you all my life if you will free me from Mr. Marsden."

The time was getting on, and yet Eileen lingered at the South Lodge. As she had stood gazing at her faded love token, it had seemed to her to matter very little what became of her since she and Basil were parted; but Mrs. Venn's story had changed her feelings.

She shrank with horror from the thought of spending her life with the man who had been her father's evil genius. She clung with despairing force to the hope of escape.

"Your part is easy enough," said Mrs. Venn, shortly. "Go home, and behave to Henry Marsden just as you would have done had he never asked you to marry him!"

"And then—"

Mrs. Venn chuckled.

"Leave that to me. You promised, remember, to obey me. I give you my word if you do as I tell you you shall not be forced to marry Marsden!"

Breakfast was over when Eileen reached the house.

Maude, in a dainty toilet, sat over the fire, talking to her guest. Marsden looked up quickly as Eileen entered, and rose to place

her a chair. Their hands just met, and the girl hoped he would not guess the thrill of horror which ran through her whole frame at the contact.

"There is a note for you," said Maude, tossing a scented billet to her sister. "I suppose from Lady May. One of the Vivian servants is waiting for your reply!"

Eileen opened it at once, and found a kind, friendly letter announcing the writer's return to Yorkshire, and her sorrow at not having seen Eileen when she called the day before. It was a most affectionate little note; but there was nothing in it, Eileen considered, to need an answer, and as writing to Lady May would now have been a task full of pain she was not a little relieved to find the servant's being waiting was a mistake of her sister's.

"I suppose you will be going over to the Court soon?" said Maude, a little suspiciously.

"I think not!"

"I heard you and her ladyship were inseparable!"

"Then you heard more than I did!" returned Eileen, quietly; and, then, picking up her hat and gloves, she walked slowly out of the room.

Marsden and her sister exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Maude, as though he had asked her a question. "I am quite sure of it. You don't know her as I do. There were tear-stains on her face; besides, I am sure that letter was an invitation to the Court, and if Mr. Courtenay had not been faithless she would have been wild to go."

Marsden looked into the fire.

"You are a wonderfully clever woman, Miss Desmond, and I shall owe you a debt of gratitude; but I don't think you are quite disinterested. It seems to me you hate my rival as strongly as I do."

"I hate the whole family!" replied Maude, affably; "but I detest the girl who is staying with Lady May most of all. She is just such another silly, sentimental child as Eileen. I can't think what you men can see in those baby faces!"

Marsden smiled.

"I should never have described your sister as babyish. However, if you help me, to my purpose, Miss Desmond, we will not quarrel about names."

"You have given her till the end of the year?"

"But I would marry her to-morrow if she will consent! Surely now Basil Courtenay has released her she will bear reason?"

"Eileen is not a particularly reasonable creature," returned Maude, sarcastically. "If I might venture on a word of advice, it would be, hurry on your suit. She may consent now just from pique."

"You do not hold out a very alluring prospect for my future domestic bliss," he said, bitterly.

Maude shrugged her shoulders.

"You are so infatuated with her, I believe you will be contented so long as you love her; and she is a good child at heart. When once she is your wife she will do her best to forget her handsome soldier."

Eileen went upstairs, and in her own room sat down to read Lady May's letter.

It was kind and even tender, but there was a strange constraint about it which Eileen felt, yet could not have described.

There was no allusion to Courtenay Hall and its inhabitants; and, though Lady May declared her disappointment at finding her friend out the previous afternoon, she made no promise of repeating her visit; nor yet did she write Eileen to come to her at the Court.

It was the very first letter she had sent during the many weeks that had passed since she said "good-bye."

She had parted from Eileen with the assurance that she regarded her as Basil's fiancée, and her own future cousin; but there was not the slightest reference to her love episode in this letter.

Really, May, in her growing distrust of Maude Desmond, had been careful to write nothing that could do harm if the missive fell into her hands, and dared not give the invitation she longed to send, lest Eileen's half-sister should consider it addressed to her. But poor little Eileen could not guess this.

Her idea was that Lady May knew of Basil's change of purpose, and shrank from the sight of the girl who would suffer by it.

One great comfort was the note required—or so our heroine decided—no answer.

She put it away in her desk, took up her work, and was preparing to go downstairs when Mrs. Ball brought her a little note written on blue paper, and sealed by an unsightly dab of red sealing-wax.

"It's that old woman at the Lodge, Miss Eileen," said the housekeeper, in an aggrieved tone. "I do believe she thinks of nothing but worrying you! There's no answer this time, the girl said."

The note, which was indeed in Mrs. Venn's quaint writing, reminded Eileen almost of the reputed mysteriousness of the Delphic oracle, so peculiarly was it worded.

"You will shortly be asked a question. Assent, but pledge yourself to no date. Above all, demand secrecy."

Maude had deserted the drawing-room when her little sister returned to it; but Mr. Marsden was still there, pacing restlessly to and fro.

He stopped abruptly in his walk as Eileen settled herself at a gipsy table, and stood looking at her as though he would read her through and through.

"You have been crying."

Eileen bent her head more closely over her work, and he continued,—

"I don't wonder at it; you have been treated cruelly! When I read the announcement, even while I rejoiced at your freedom, I longed to wring the fellow's neck!"

"You are talking very strangely!" said Eileen, with quiet dignity. "I fail to understand you."

"Read that."

He put into her hands a society newspaper, open to show the column of fashionable intelligence. One paragraph had been underscored in red ink.

"We understand that Basil Courtenay, Esq., of the Guards, eldest son and heir of Sir Bryan Courtenay, Baronet, will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar, Laura, the only child of General Peyton, whose Blankshire estates join those of Sir Bryan. Miss Peyton's enormous fortune and great personal attractions render her one of the most eligible brides for a man of ancient birth but heavily encumbered lands."

Eileen read on to the end without flinching.

"You had seen it before," said her tormentor. "You were prepared for the news."

"I was quite prepared for it."

"You were ready to send your father to a felon's dock rather than disappoint Mr. Courtenay. He deserved your devotion, didn't he?"

The girl's eyes flashed with indignation.

"You are my father's guest, and as such I am bound to be civil to you; but I warn you you may go too far!"

Marsden smiled.

"A little excitement becomes you wonderfully. I need not fear having too statuesque a wife!"

Eileen bit her lips.

"You have no right to say such a thing!" she cried. "How dare you take it for granted that even now I will marry you?"

"You gave Mr. Courtenay's prior claim on you as the reason of my rejection. You may try to pose as adamant, but I believe you have far too much heart really to condemn your father to penal servitude just for a whim of your own."

Eileen looked at him with a strange, bewildered expression in her violet eyes.

"I think sometimes you have no feeling at all—that nature must have made you without

a heart! No human creature calling himself a man would torture me as you do!"

"You must confess this announcement," and she touched the obnoxious paragraph, "makes a great change in your circumstances."

"It does not change one thing—my intense aversion to becoming your wife!"

"You are frank at least."

Eileen clasped her hands together and made one last appeal.

"Surely," she pleaded, "you will have some pity on me! Surely you will not press your suit on me. You know I do not love you, that if fear for my father's safety induced me to stand beside you at the altar, the marriage service being read over us would not change my feelings towards you. As your wife I should avoid and fear you just as I do now."

He shook his head.

"At least you will belong to me, no one in all the world will have the power to steal you from me," rejoined Marsden bitterly.

Eileen trembled. The repressed passion in his voice, the strange feverish sparkle in his eyes held her almost spellbound.

"What do you want of me?" she asked.

"You gave me a certain time in which to make up my mind, and it has not half elapsed."

"It was too long," said Marsden hurriedly.

"I should never have named such a long interval only I thought it would take time for you to break off your correspondence with Mr. Courtenay."

"We never corresponded," said Eileen hotly.

"Well, your position is quite different now. Your father and I don't hit it off particularly well, and it's rather hard on him to have to entertain me for six weeks longer. You must give me my answer sooner."

"When?"

"In a fortnight."

Eileen bowed her head.

"You quite understand?" he repeated.

"Perfectly. In a fortnight's time I have to give you my decision, and if it is unfavourable, you are free at once to commence your proceedings against Lord Desmond."

She bowed to him with the slightest possible inclination of her little head, and left him to his thoughts, for she longed to see Mrs. Venn, and inquire whether she had understood aright her mysterious warning. A request had been made, but was it the one in the widow's mind? She had assented and had been careful to name no specific time. "Within a fortnight," was surely vague enough. But what did it all mean, and what was running in Mrs. Venn's head when she made such extraordinary suggestions?

"Yes," said the old woman, approvingly, "that'll do; but next time he speaks to you you must consent outright."

Eileen shuddered.

"Promise to marry him?"

"You must promise to marry him, my dear," said Mrs. Venn resolutely; "but you can make your own conditions. Tell him plainly you won't be married under six months, and that if he attempts to publish your engagement you are off your bargain. Make him understand you promise only for your father's sake, and that if anything happened to Lord Desmond you'd break it off."

"Do you mean I am to promise to marry Mr. Marsden, and then trust to my father's death to set me free?" asked Eileen in horror.

"Nothing of the sort; engage yourself to Henry Marsden, binding him to secrecy. Make it a condition that he delivers the papers into your own keeping the morning of the wedding-day."

"Miss Eileen, I can't speak plainly, but that day'll never dawn. I can't help your having to promise to marry him—unless indeed, you feel brave enough to risk all, and bid him do his worst; but I promise you you shall never be his wife."



"I think it would kill me."

"You needn't fear," said Mrs. Venn, cheerfully; "and now, my dear, just look up and take courage. You shall never marry Mr. Marsden, that much we've settled. Now tell me something else; are you very fond of your sister? Should you be sorry if you never saw her face again?"

"I know it's wicked; but I think I should be glad!"

"And you could be content to leave your father for a time, perhaps for several months?"

Eileen bowed her head.

"He does not love me as he used to do, Mrs. Venn. It seems to me in all the world there is no one who really cares for me. I am of no use to anyone. No one wants me, and I am so tired I should like to die!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Venn. Then changing the subject with great suddenness, she demanded,—"Why doesn't your housekeeper like me?"

"I think she fancies the fortunes of the Desmonds have fallen terribly low since they are reduced to letting the South Lodge, and so she connects you in a measure with the disasters."

"Is she fond of you?"

"Very; she is devoted to the Desmonds, heart and soul, and as she cannot take to Maude, I am in for a double share of her regard."

"Perhaps she suspects this Marsden's designs?"

"I think she does. She has never said a word to me, but she simply detests him, and has done so from the moment of his coming to Desmondville."

"Do you think she would come and see me?"

"She couldn't," said Eileen, leaving the point of Mrs. Ball's willingness unanswered. "You have no idea of all she has to do—especially now we have a visitor; why she is worked to death."

"Then I shall come and see her," returned Mrs. Venn, coolly; "and Miss Eileen, I wish you'd make her understand you want her to be civil to me."

Eileen found her task a hard one. She went straight to the point, knowing Ball was too devoted to the family to betray her confidence even to her own husband.

"Ball, I am in great trouble!"

"There's no need to tell me that, Miss Eileen. I've seen it coming for days, and I think I could give a good guess as to who has been worrying you. Bad luck to his evil face!"

"There is only one person who can help me," said Eileen. "I don't know how even she can manage it; but she knew Mr. Marsden abroad, when he was quite poor, and she says if I follow her advice she will save me."

"It's evil times for the Desmonds when a man like that dares to lift his eyes to one of my young ladies," said Ball, wrathfully. "As for Mrs. Venn—I guess that's who you mean, Miss Eileen—I always did think there was something uncanny about her, and if she helps you to get the better of Mr. Marsden, when he has my lord and Miss Desmond to support him, I shall believe she's a witch!"

"She is not that, Ball. She wants to come and see you. She said she couldn't manage anything unless you helped her."

"Well, Miss Eileen, I always have kept myself to myself, and lived respectable. I never thought of being friendly with a woman nobody knows ought of; but if it's to help you, I don't know as I can refuse."

"She said she would come about half-past eight," said Eileen. "Ball, I know you don't like it; but do try and be civil to her, for she is just my last hope!"

Ball turned to her young lady with a sob.

"Miss Eileen, I'm but an old servant; but I'd rather give my heart's best blood than see

you marry a man like that who has grown rich on the misery of the poor and on oppressing those who can't help themselves. You need not say a word. I know it's for your father's sake. This Marsden has money, and my lord and Miss Maude are tired of being poor. Why couldn't she marry him if he must have one of you. His evil ways wouldn't have troubled her as they will you, my child!"

Eileen could only repeat her entreaties that the old housekeeper would receive Mrs. Venn in a friendly spirit; and at last wrung from her a promise she would do her best.

Eileen was not present at the arrival. When she could steal away to Ball's sitting-room the visitor had been there a full half-hour, and was sitting in the place of honour by the fire, looking decidedly at home, while Mrs. Ball, her best friend Sunday Blackmill, seemed mightily impressed by all that had been said to her.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Venn, with a sagacious nod to Eileen. "I'm going straight home to write to Lord Desmond. The Lodge lacks so when it rains. 'Tis wants putting in thorough repair; then I shall say he has a mighty lot of empty rooms in his own house and might well allot me two till my own place is ready for me again."

Mrs. Ball gave a concession of little more as though she quite agreed with every word of the widow's, and then delivered herself of the following oracular speech,—

"It's a mighty risky business; but folks can't have anything for naught, and, for certain, it harms no one, and may do some people a heap of good, so I'm your very obedient servant, Mrs. Venn; and whatever you say I'll carry out."

"I'd best go home and write my letter," returned Mrs. Venn. "My! won't Miss Desmond be put out?"

"Put out!" was a mild description for Maude's state of mind, when, two days later, her father informed her he had given Mrs. Venn permission to occupy two of the unused rooms in the servants' wing of Desmondville while the South Lodge was repaired, she was almost mad with fury.

"A low, common woman like that in our house! No better than a common tramp! My lord, you must have lost your senses!"

"My dear!" said Lord Desmond, wearily, "I can't offend the woman. I simply dare not; and the matter is very trifling. There must be a dozen unused rooms in the east wing. She brings her own servant to attend on her, and you will probably never set eyes on either of them. The whole affair will disturb your comfort no more than if Ball invited a couple of friends to stay with her."

"I think it monstrous!"

It was a relief to her feelings that one of her plans came to a successful crisis that very day. In the afternoon Mr. Marsden sought her to tell her her sister had at last consented to be his wife.

"I knew it was only a case of time," said Maude, triumphantly. "Now, when is it to be?"

Marsden smiled.

"The strangest part is, she seems as anxious for haste as she was previously for delay. Perhaps she feels she would like to be married before her faithless lover. Anyhow, in less than three weeks I am to be a happy man!"

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Maude, in dismay. "She can't be ready in the time. Think of the preparations—the trousseau!"

"We don't mean to have a fuss. Eileen agrees with me the more quietly such things are done the better. She is very sensible, though she makes the most extraordinary conditions. Actually insists for one that the engagement shall be a secret."

"And the others?"

"That I am to deliver certain papers (that you know of) into her hands on the wedding-day, after the ceremony, and that if, by any unforeseen chance, we are not married on the appointed day, she shall be quite free."

"That last is absurd! If you are only to deliver the papers to her when she is your wife the inducement to marry you would remain the same however often the day was deferred."

Mrs. Venn arrived that evening in a fly from Whitby—a great piece of extravagance considering the Lodge was ten minutes' walk at most.

Maude steadily ignored the affair, but was not above listening to such scraps of gossip as could be gained from old Tony without a point blank question.

The old man was somewhat of a chatterbox; and, encouraged by Miss Desmond's affability, he told her Mrs. Venn was a great favourite with his wife.

The "old woman" held out against her for a long time, but was quite won over when they met.

She seemed a nice, sensible body, and had brought a very respectable servant from Whitby to wait on her instead of the girl who attended to her wants at the Lodge.

So far from being a trouble, the self-invited inmate was an acquisition. She was most generous in lending her maid's services, and not above assisting herself in the preparation of dainties for the late dinner.

Maude shrugged her shoulders.

"Papa spoils everyone!" she said, sarcastically. "Papa turning Desmondville into a boarding-house for old lodge-keepers!"

But two days after Mrs. Venn's advent, when Maude—despite Mr. Marsden's assurance he should be satisfied with a quiet wedding—was busy choosing dresses for her sister, a great consternation fell on the house, for Eileen, who had never ailed anything in her life, Eileen, who had seemed the picture of health, was taken dangerously ill!

Miss Desmond's first idea was to make light of the indisposition, and call it fancy; but when she saw her sister's flushed face and glittering, fever-bright eyes, she felt alarmed.

They had never needed a doctor since coming to Yorkshire, and the village practice had just changed hands, so that they had not even seen the new medical man; but it seemed compulsory to send for him, though Mrs. Ball was very anxious to summon an authority from Whitby; but Maude Desmond always studied economy when her own comfort was concerned, and so Jonas Gale, surgeon, was the person called in to see Eileen.

Maude met him in the hall, explained the symptoms, and would have taken him to see the patient, but Mrs. Ball, who was ready to do this herself, dropped a hint of infection, which was quite enough to send Maude back to her own room to anoint herself with vinegar and other disinfectants.

Mr. Marsden had gone up to London on important business.

Lord Desmond, happy in the thought of coming security, and in the present enjoyment of a very handsome loan (?) from his son-in-law elect, was also disporting himself in the metropolis, so Maude had her sister solely in her hands.

Mr. Gale was so long before he returned, that she grew uneasy.

What if Eileen were really ill, and this marriage, which was to do so much for them all, had to be postponed?

Surely never was girl troubled with so provoking a half-sister! and Maude pitied herself devoutly.

The surgeon's report was not encouraging.

He did not absolutely say there was no hope, but he declared Eileen was in imminent danger.

There had been some terrible shock to the nervous system, and the exhaustion which supervened was so complete he doubted if there was strength enough to rally.

"She must rally!" said Miss Desmond, fiercely. "She is to be married in less than three weeks!"

her a chair. Their hands just met, and the girl hoped he would not guess the thrill of horror which ran through her whole frame at the contact.

"There is a note for you," said Maude, tossing a scented billet to her sister. "I suppose from Lady May. One of the Vivian servants is waiting for your reply!"

Eileen opened it at once, and found a kind, friendly letter announcing the writer's return to Yorkshire, and her sorrow at not having seen Eileen when she called the day before. It was a most affectionate little note; but there was nothing in it, Eileen considered, to need an answer, and as writing to Lady May would now have been a task full of pain she was not a little relieved to find the servant's being waiting was a mistake of her sister's.

"I suppose you will be going over to the Court soon?" said Maude, a little suspiciously.

"I think not!"

"I heard you and her ladyship were inseparable!"

"Then you heard more than I did!" returned Eileen, quietly; and, then, picking up her hat and gloves, she walked slowly out of the room.

Marsden and her sister exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Maude, as though he had asked her a question. "I am quite sure of it. You don't know her as I do. There were tear-stains on her face; besides, I am sure that letter was an invitation to the Court, and if Mr. Courtenay had not been faithless she would have been wild to go."

Marsden looked into the fire.

"You are a wonderfully clever woman, Miss Desmond, and I shall owe you a debt of gratitude; but I don't think you are quite disinterested. It seems to me you hate my rival as strongly as I do."

"I hate the whole family!" replied Maude, affably; "but I detest the girl who is staying with Lady May most of all. She is just such another silly, sentimental child as Eileen. I can't think what you men can see in those baby faces!"

Marsden smiled.

"I should never have described your sister as babyish. However, if you help me to my purpose, Miss Desmond, we will not quarrel about names."

"You have given her till the end of the year?"

"But I would marry her to-morrow if she will consent! Surely now Basil Courtenay has released her she will hear reason?"

"Eileen is not a particularly reasonable creature," returned Maude, sarcastically. "If I might venture on a word of advice, it would be, hurry on your suit. She may consent now just from pique."

"You do not hold out a very alluring prospect for my future domestic bliss," he said, bitterly.

Maude shrugged her shoulders.

"You are so infatuated with her, I believe you will be contented so long as you love her; and she is a good child at heart. When once she is your wife she will do her best to forget her handsome soldier."

Eileen went upstairs, and in her own room sat down to read Lady May's letter.

It was kind and even tender, but there was a strange constraint about it which Eileen felt, yet could not have described.

There was no allusion to Courtenay Hall and its inhabitants; and, though Lady May declared her disappointment at finding her friend out the previous afternoon, she made no promise of repeating her visit; nor yet did she write Eileen to come to her at the Court.

It was the very first letter she had sent during the many weeks that had passed since she said "good-bye."

She had parted from Eileen with the assurance that she regarded her as Basil's fiancée, and her own future cousin; but there was not the slightest reference to her love episode in this letter.

Really, May, in her growing distrust of Maude Desmond, had been careful to write nothing that could do harm if the missive fell into her hands, and dared not give the invitation she longed to send, lest Eileen's half-sister should consider it addressed to her. But poor little Eileen could not guess this.

Her idea was that Lady May knew of Basil's change of purpose, and shrink from the sight of the girl who would suffer by it.

One great comfort was the note required—or so our heroine decided—no answer.

She put it away in her desk, took up her work, and was preparing to go downstairs when Mrs. Ball brought her a little note written on blue paper, and sealed by an unsightly dab of red sealing-wax.

"It's that old woman at the Lodge, Miss Eileen," said the housekeeper, in an aggrieved tone. "I do believe she thinks of nothing but worrying you! There's no answer this time, the girl said."

The note, which was indeed in Mrs. Venn's quaint writing, reminded Eileen almost of the reputed mysteriousness of the Delphic oracle, so peculiarly was it worded.

"You will shortly be asked a question. Assent, but pledge yourself to no date. Above all, demand secrecy."

Maude had deserted the drawing-room when her little sister returned to it; but Mr. Marsden was still there, pacing restlessly to and fro.

He stopped abruptly in his walk as Eileen settled herself at a gipsy table, and stood looking at her as though he would read her through and through.

"You have been crying."

Eileen bent her head more closely over her work, and he continued,—

"I don't wonder at it; you have been treated cruelly! When I read the announcement, even while I rejoiced at your freedom, I longed to wring the fellow's neck!"

"You are talking very strangely!" said Eileen, with quiet dignity. "I fail to understand you."

"Read that."

He put into her hands a society newspaper, open to show the column of fashionable intelligence. One paragraph had been underscored in red ink.

"We understand that Basil Courtenay, Esq., of the Guards, eldest son and heir of Sir Bryan Courtenay, Baronet, will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar, Laura, the only child of General Peyton, whose Blankshire estates join those of Sir Bryan. Miss Peyton's enormous fortune and great personal attractions render her one of the most eligible brides for a man of ancient birth but heavily encumbered lands."

Eileen read on to the end without flinching.

"You had seen it before," said her tormentor. "You were prepared for the news."

"I was quite prepared for it."

"You were ready to send your father to a felon's dock rather than disappoint Mr. Courtenay. He deserved your devotion, didn't he?"

The girl's eyes flashed with indignation.

"You are my father's guest, and as such I am bound to be civil to you; but I warn you you may go too far!"

Marsden smiled.

"A little excitement becomes you wonderfully. I need not fear having too statuesque a wife!"

Eileen bit her lips.

"You have no right to say such a thing!" she cried. "How dare you take it for granted that even now I will marry you?"

"You gave Mr. Courtenay's prior claim on you as the reason of my rejection. You may try to pose as adamant, but I believe you have far too much heart really to condemn your father to penal servitude just for a whim of your own."

Eileen looked at him with a strange, bewildered expression in her violet eyes.

"I think sometimes you have no feeling at all—that nature must have made you without

a heart! No human creature calling himself a man would torture me as you do!"

"You must confess this announcement," and he touched the obnoxious paragraph, "makes a great change in your circumstances."

"It does not change one thing—my intense aversion to becoming your wife!"

"You are frank at least."

Eileen clasped her hands together and made one last appeal.

"Surely," she pleaded, "you will have some pity on me! Surely you will not press your suit on me. You know I do not love you, that if fear for my father's safety induced me to stand beside you at the altar, the marriage service being read over us would not change my feelings towards you. As your wife I should avoid and fear you just as I do now."

He shook his head.

"At least you will belong to me, no one in all the world will have the power to steal you from me," rejoined Marsden bitterly.

Eileen trembled. The repressed passion in his voice, the strange feverish sparkle in his eyes held her almost spellbound.

"What do you want of me?" she asked.

"You gave me a certain time in which to make up my mind, and it has not half elapsed."

"It was too long," said Marsden hurriedly. "I should never have named such a long interval only I thought it would take time for you to break off your correspondence with Mr. Courtenay."

"We never corresponded," said Eileen hotly.

"Well, your position is quite different now. Your father and I don't hit it off particularly well, and it's rather hard on him to have to entertain me for six weeks longer. You must give me my answer sooner."

"When?"

"In a fortnight."

Eileen bowed her head.

"You quite understand?" he repeated.

"Perfectly. In a fortnight's time I have to give you my decision, and if it is unfavourable, you are free at once to commence your proceedings against Lord Desmond."

She bowed to him with the slightest possible inclination of her little head, and left him to his thoughts, for she longed to see Mrs. Venn, and inquire whether she had understood aright her mysterious warning. A request had been made, but was it the one in the widow's mind? She had assented and had been careful to name no specific time. "Within a fortnight," was surely vague enough. But what did it all mean, and what was running in Mrs. Venn's head when she made such extraordinary suggestions?

"Yes," said the old woman, approvingly, "that'll do; but next time he speaks to you you must consent outright."

Eileen shuddered.

"Promise to marry him?"

"You must promise to marry him, my dear," said Mrs. Venn resolutely; "but you can make your own conditions. Tell him plainly you won't be married under six months, and that if he attempts to publish your engagement you are off your bargain. Make him understand you promise only for your father's sake, and that if anything happened to Lord Desmond you'd break it off."

"Do you mean I am to promise to marry Mr. Marsden, and then trust to my father's death to set me free?" asked Eileen in horror.

"Nothing of the sort; engage yourself to Henry Marsden, binding him to secrecy. Make it a condition that he delivers the papers into your own keeping the morning of the wedding-day."

"Miss Eileen, I can't speak plainly, but that day'll never dawn. I can't help your having to promise to marry him—unless indeed, you feel brave enough to risk all, and bid him do his worst; but I promise you you shall never be his wife."



"I think it would kill me."

"You needn't fear," said Mrs. Venn, cheerfully; "and now, my dear, just look up and take courage. You shall never marry Mr. Marsden, that much we've settled. Now tell me something else; are you very fond of your sister? Should you be sorry if you never saw her face again?"

"I know it's wicked; but I think I should be glad!"

"And you could be content to leave your father for a time, perhaps for several months?"

Eileen bowed her head.

"He does not love me as he used to do, Mrs. Venn. It seems to me in all the world there is no one who really cares for me. I am of no use to anyone. No one wants me, and I am so tired I should like to die!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Venn. Then changing the subject with great suddenness, she demanded,—"Why doesn't your housekeeper like me?"

"I think she fancies the fortunes of the Desmonds have fallen terribly low since they are reduced to letting the South Lodge, and so she connects you in a measure with the disasters."

"Is she fond of you?"

"Very; she is devoted to the Desmonds, heart and soul, and as she cannot take to Maude, I am in for a double share of her regard."

"Perhaps she suspects this Marsden's designs?"

"I think she does. She has never said a word to me, but she simply detests him, and has done so from the moment of his coming to Desmondville."

"Do you think she would come and see me?"

"She couldn't," said Eileen, leaving the point of Mrs. Ball's willingness unanswered. "You have no idea of all she has to do—especially now we have a visitor; why she is worked to death."

"Then I shall come and see her," returned Mrs. Venn, coolly; "and Miss Eileen, I wish you'd make her understand you want her to be civil to me."

Eileen found her task a hard one. She went straight to the point, knowing Ball was too devoted to the 'family' to betray her confidence even to her own husband.

"Ball, I am in great trouble!"

"There's no need to tell me that, Miss Eileen. I've seen it coming for days, and I think I could give a good guess as to who has been worrying you. Bad luck to his evil face!"

"There is only one person who can help me," said Eileen. "I don't know how even she can manage it; but she knew Mr. Marsden abroad, when he was quite poor, and she says if I follow her advice she will save me."

"It's evil times for the Desmonds when a man like that dares to lift his eyes to one of my young ladies," said Ball, wrathfully. "As for Mrs. Venn—I guess that's who you mean, Miss Eileen—I always did think there was something uncanny about her, and if she helps you to get the better of Mr. Marsden, when he has my lord and Miss Desmond to support him, I shall believe she's a witch!"

"She is not that, Ball. She wants to come and see you. She said she couldn't manage anything unless you helped her."

"Well, Miss Eileen, I always have kept myself to myself, and lived respectable. I never thought of being friendly with a woman nobody knows ought of; but if it's to help you, I don't know as I can refuse."

"She said she would come about half-past eight," said Eileen. "Ball, I know you don't like it; but do try and be civil to her, for she is just my last hope!"

Ball turned to her young lady with a sob.

"Miss Eileen, I'm but an old servant; but I'd rather give my heart's best blood than see

you marry a man like that who has grown rich on the misery of the poor and on oppressing those who can't help themselves. You need not say a word. I know it's for your father's sake. This Marsden has money, and my lord and Miss Maude are tired of being poor. Why couldn't she marry him if he must have one of you. His evil ways wouldn't have troubled her as they will you, my child!"

Eileen could only repeat her entreaties that the old housekeeper would receive Mrs. Venn in a friendly spirit; and at last wrung from her a promise she would do her best.

Eileen was not present at the arrival. When she could steal away to Ball's sitting-room the visitor had been there a full half-hour, and was sitting in the place of honour by the fire, looking decidedly at home, while Mrs. Ball, in her best and Sunday black silk, seemed mightily impressed by all that had been said to her.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Venn, with a sagacious nod to Eileen. "I'm going straight home to write to Lord Desmond. The Lodge leaks so when it rains. It wants putting in thorough repair; when I shall say he has a mighty lot of empty rooms in his own house and might well allot me two till my own place is ready for me again."

Mrs. Ball gave a succession of little nods as though she quite agreed with every word of the widow's, and then delivered herself of the following oracular speech,—

"It's a mighty risky business; but folks can't have anything for nought, and, for certain, it harms no one, and may do some people a heap of good, so I'm your very obedient servant, Mrs. Venn; and whatever you say I'll carry out."

"I'd best go home and write my letter," returned Mrs. Venn. "My lord Miss Desmond be put out?"

"Put out!" was a mild description for Maude's state of mind, when, two days later, her father informed her he had given Mrs. Venn permission to occupy two of the unused rooms in the servants' wing of Desmondville while the South Lodge was repaired, she was almost mad with fury.

"A low, common woman like that in our house! No better than a common tramp! My lord, you must have lost your senses!"

"My dear!" said Lord Desmond, wearily, "I can't offend the woman. I simply dare not; and the matter is very trifling. There must be a dozen unused rooms in the east wing. She brings her own servant to attend on her, and you will probably never set eyes on either of them. The whole affair will disturb your comfort no more than if Ball invited a couple of friends to stay with her."

"I think it monstrous!"

It was a relief to her feelings that one of her plans came to a successful crisis that very day. In the afternoon Mr. Marsden sought her to tell her her sister had at last consented to be his wife.

"I knew it was only a case of time," said Maude, triumphantly. "Now, when is it to be?"

Marsden smiled.

"The strangest part is, she seems as anxious for haste as she was previously for delay. Perhaps she feels she would like to be married before her faithless lover. Anyhow, in less than three weeks I am to be a happy man!"

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Maude, in dismay, "she can't be ready in the time. Think of the preparations—the trousseau!"

"We don't mean to have a fuss. Eileen agrees with me the more quietly such things are done the better. She is very sensible, though she makes the most extraordinary conditions. Actually insists for one that the engagement shall be a secret."

"And the others?"

"That I am to deliver certain papers (that you know of) into her hands on the wedding-day, after the ceremony, and that if, by any unforeseen chance, we are not married on the appointed day, she shall be quite free."

"That last is absurd! If you are only to deliver the papers to her when she is your wife the inducement to marry you would remain the same however often the day was deferred."

Mrs. Venn arrived that evening in a fly from Whitby—a great piece of extravagance considering the Lodge was ten minutes' walk at most.

Maude steadily ignored the affair, but was not above listening to such scraps of gossip as could be gained from old Tony without a point blank question.

The old man was somewhat of a chatterbox; and, encouraged by Miss Desmond's affability, he told her Mrs. Venn was a great favourite with his wife.

The "old woman" held out against her for a long time, but was quite won over when they met.

She seemed a nice, sensible body, and had brought a very respectable servant from Whitby to wait on her instead of the girl who attended to her wants at the Lodge.

So far from being a trouble, the self-invited inmate was an acquisition. She was most generous in lending her maid's services, and not above assisting herself in the preparation of dainties for the late dinner.

Maude shrugged her shoulders.

"Papa spoils everyone!" she said, sarcastically. "Fancy turning Desmondville into a boarding-house for old lodge-keepers!"

But two days after Mrs. Venn's advent, when Maude—despite Mr. Marsden's assurance he should be satisfied with a quiet wedding—was busy choosing dresses for her sister, a great consternation fell on the house, for Eileen, who had never ailed anything in her life, Eileen, who had seemed the picture of health, was taken dangerously ill!

Miss Desmond's first idea was to make light of the indisposition, and call it fancy; but when she saw her sister's flushed face and glittering, fever-bright eyes, she felt alarmed.

They had never needed a doctor since coming to Yorkshire, and the village practice had just changed hands, so that they had not even seen the new medical man; but it seemed compulsory to send for him, though Mrs. Ball was very anxious to summon an authority from Whitby; but Maude Desmond always studied economy when her own comfort was concerned, and so Jonas Gale, surgeon, was the person called in to see Eileen.

Maude met him in the hall, explained the symptoms, and would have taken him to see the patient, but Mrs. Ball, who was ready to do this herself, dropped a hint of infection, which was quite enough to send Maude back to her own room to anoint herself with vinegar and other disinfectants.

Mr. Marsden had gone up to London on important business.

Lord Desmond, happy in the thought of coming security, and in the present enjoyment of a very handsome loan (?) from his son-in-law elect, was also disporting himself in the metropolis, so Maude had her sister solely in her hands.

Mr. Gale was so long before he returned, that she grew uneasy.

What if Eileen were really ill, and this marriage, which was to do so much for them all, had to be postponed?

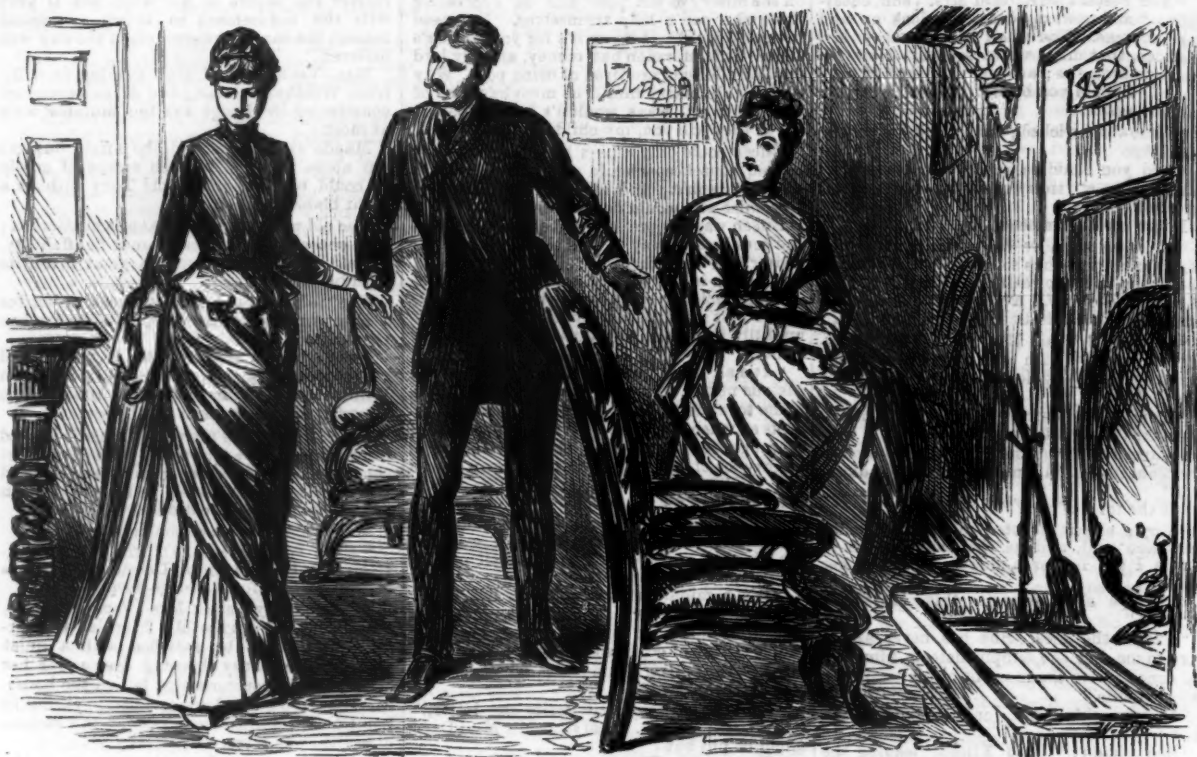
Surely never was girl troubled with so provoking a half-sister! and Maude pitied herself devoutly.

The surgeon's report was not encouraging.

He did not absolutely say there was no hope, but he declared Eileen was in imminent danger.

There had been some terrible shock to the nervous system, and the exhaustion which supervened was so complete he doubted if there was strength enough to rally.

"She must rally!" said Miss Desmond, tersely. "She is to be married in less than three weeks!"



[EILEEN HOPED HE WOULD NOT GUESS THE THRILL OF HORROR WHICH RAN THROUGH HER AT THE CONTACT WITH HIS HAND.]

"I fear the ceremony must be postponed. It is a pity you did not send for me sooner!"

"She seemed perfectly well."

"This illness must have been coming on for weeks!"

"Would you advise my sending for my father?"

"Certainly. And it might be a consolation to Lord Desmond and the poor young lady's fiancé if you sent for a second opinion. Sir Hercules Brown is an authority in these matters."

But, like John Gilpin's wife, Maude Desmond possessed—when her own comfort was not concerned—a very frugal mind.

Sir Hercules might charge fifty pounds. If Eileen recovered, it would be nothing; but then she would probably recover without his aid, and such an expense incurred for nothing would be a serious affliction to the survivors, so Maude turned to the young surgeon with a winning confidence.

"You do not think Sir Hercules could do more for her than yourself? You only suggest his opinion as a comfort to us?"

"Homenly speaking, Miss Desmond, he could do nothing for your sister; but it was my duty to suggest his being summoned."

"I would rather trust to you," said Maude, sweetly; "pray come as often as you can. I will telegraph at once for my father and Mr. Marsden."

But it was only when she sat down to do so she remembered she did not know the address of her brother-in-law elect, while, as for Lord Desmond, he had frankly told her he wanted to enjoy himself without bills being sent after him, so that he thought it better not to tell her the name of his hotel.

Many a girl would have been daunted by this double difficulty, but Maude was a resolute young woman. She dispatched one telegram to her father's elect, and another to Lady Vivian, adjuring her, if she had any

knowledge of Lord Desmond's movements, to send him home at once.

She went to Eileen's room, but did not sit there for any time. She had never loved her sister. She had done much—far more than the world knew of—to wreck her happiness. Given the power, she would have acted the same again, but there must have been something human about her, for she did not like to linger near her victim, the white, wan face looking so pale and fragile now the fever flush had faded, smote her with a strange remorse, and she wished most heartily either her father or Mr. Marsden would return.

Three days passed. Mr. Gale's report each day grew more hopeless. Fresh telegrams had been sent, but no answers received. At last, in the dead of night, a fly dashed up the avenue; it was father and lover come at last! They had chanced to meet that morning as Lord Desmond was going to his club. The long deferred telegram was there and told them of Eileen's danger.

They caught the first train from the north and drove on from Whitby as fast as horses could take them.

It was Mrs. Venn who opened the door. The old woman had been Eileen's chief nurse since the beginning of her illness, besides sharing the domestic duties with Mrs. Ball; but, of course, Lord Desmond did not know this, and it struck on him with an awed fear of arising trouble when he saw the withered cheeks and bead-like eyes of his much feared tenant.

"How is my daughter?" he asked, eagerly.

"How is the invalid?" echoed Marsden.

The woman looked them full in the face, and there was a bitter expression on her own. Perhaps she was recalling all Eileen had suffered at their hands, but her answer was quietly given in two words.

"At rest."

"You mean she is asleep?"

"Ay," said the woman, quietly, "but it's

the sleep that needs no waking. She died at sunset, my lord, and you've come too late!"

(To be continued.)

**OLD EGYPTIAN SKILL.**—The ancient Egyptians excelled in nice mechanical work, and it might puzzle some of our masons and stone-workers to equal them at the present day. Mr. Kendrick, in speaking of the casing of the great pyramid, says: "The joints are scarcely perceptible, and not wider than the thickness of silver paper; and the cement so tenacious that fragments of the casing-stones still remain in their original position, notwithstanding the lapse of so many centuries, and the violence by which they were detached. All the fine work of the interior passages where granite is not expressly mentioned is of the same stone, and finished with the same beautiful exactness. But the skill in quarrying was displayed more in the extracting of the huge blocks out of which obelisks and colossal statues were hewn. Obelisks ninety and statues forty feet high, each fashioned out of one stone, were not uncommon things; and the blocks selected for these monuments were not chance splinters from barbarous efforts of splitting and smashing, but clean slices separated *secundum artem* from the native rock, after being selected and accurately defined. And how was this done—by driving in huge iron wedges? No, indeed; that would probably have split the stone. By infinite labour, then, in chiseling and sawing? Pooh! The old Egyptians knew a trick somewhat cleverer than that; they cut a small groove along the whole length of say, one hundred feet, and in this inserted a number of dry wooden wedges; then they pour water into the groove, and the wedges expanding simultaneously, and with great force, broke away the large fragments as neatly as a strip of glass is taken off by a diamond.





["YOU HAVEN'T IMPROVED!" BERT SAYS. "WHAT TROUBLES YOU, RUBIE?"]

NOVELLETTE.]

## THE LADY OF CLIFF HOUSE.

—O—

### CHAPTER I.

RUBIE ROYALE.

In the long drawing-room of a stately West-end mansion a goodly company basks in the radiance of the electric light.

It is the town house of Sir John and Lady Royale, and her ladyship holds the last reception of the season to-night.

All the *élite* that are left in London are there, and the evening is passing with all the *télat* for which Lady Royale's entertainments are famous.

The notes of a Broadwood's Grand, accompanied by the slow throbbing of a harp, fill the spacious room with melody, above which a fresh young voice trills sweet and clear.

The daughter of the house is the performer on the piano, at which she is an acknowledged expert.

Rubie Royale is sweet seventeen and very lovely. Her Christian name does not exactly suit her. The name of Rubie is usually associated with dusky cheeks and flashing black eyes; but Rubie Royale is fair as fair can be; the rose and lily are blended in her sweet face, and her abundant hair is like a cloud of golden floss. She is just such a daughter as might be expected from such a mother as Lady Royale.

The latter is a beautiful woman, tall and fair, and so graceful and youthful that she is usually taken for Rubie's elder sister.

Sir John and Lady Royale had been strolling through the rooms, laughing and chatting with their guests.

Passing near the piano they mingle with the crowd of fashionable men that usually surround the instrument when Miss Royale is playing, and the proud parents are much

elated at the plaudits with which the fair Rubie is greeted.

Conspicuous among those who rally around the singer is a tall young man, whose fine lithe figure and erect carriage, bears the unmistakable stamp of military training.

It is easy to see that the handsome young soldier is one of Miss Rubie's adorers. He makes no secret of his feelings; his open countenance and fine brown eyes betray them. While he turns and arranges her music he watches the fair fingers, and listens to the trills of the sweet voice with passionate attention.

The song is finished, and the girl stands up from the instrument amid a buzz of applause from the guests, who make way for her as she moves quickly and gracefully to her mother's side. She is closely followed by the tall young man.

"My love, you have acquitted yourself very well to-night. You have surpassed yourself, dear! You sang that last song exquisitely," the elder lady says blandly, with her studied society smile.

Rubie laughs gaily at her mother's gratified pride. She then turns with a swift swing, and walks away, still followed by the military youth, who does not seem to be well pleased with the young lady's indifference.

Two ladies vacate a most delightfully yielding couch at sight of Rubie's fair, flower face.

"How silly the girls are nowadays, and what ridiculous styles they adopt. Look at that wretched apology for a gown that is on Rubie. She seems half naked to the waist in it! You can see the white gleam of her neck and arms through it!" one elderly lady says to another, as they watch Rubie sink with a resful sigh into the soft depths of the couch.

"Oh, Bert, what a bore everybody and everything is!" she observes, lazily.

"Including your humble servant," her companion answers, dubiously.

"Yes, including you. Why, Bertie, you seem to be quite eaten up by the green-eyed monster lately. What's the matter, Bert?" and Rubie's big blue eyes look up at him over the top of her fan.

"Shall I tell you what the matter is, Miss Royale?" he answers, as he leans with folded arms against a carved cabinet.

"Ah, do Bert, tell me, please," the girl says with a mischievous smile, as she waves her exquisite fan to and fro.

"Does it ever occur to you, Rubie, that you treat your adorers very badly, me in particular?"

"No, I have never thought about it," Miss Rubie says in a startled tone as the long lashes are raised slowly, and the big blue eyes take a languid survey of her companion.

"Would Guy Dawson or Lewis Callon speak to me like that," she murmurs softly, as the long lashes descend slowly on the delicate cheek.

"They have not the temerity, they would not dare, they are both in bondage."

"But they are not tired of their bondage, like you!" and again the white lids uplifting disclose the velvety depths of her beautiful eyes.

"Ah, those silken fetters, who could ever tire of them?"

"I think you do, Bertie; but if you wish, I am willing to release you from your bondage," she answers disdainfully.

"You don't mean what you say, Rubie, I'm sure you don't."

"Don't be too sure. Of whom are you jealous?"

"Several—e'r, but one in particular."

"And that one?"

"Caton Belgrave."

A wave of rosy colour passes over the sweet face, and she fans herself vigorously to hide the tell-tale blush. Then laughing softly, she says,—

"You know I like Colonel Belgrave very

much, and I am proud of his admiration, but I would never choose him for a lover."

"Then why flirt with him? The difference between his age and yours is too great to permit of flirtation between you!" he answers hotly.

"Age, indeed! Caton Belgrave is not more than thirty-five."

"And you are just seventeen, Miss Royale!"

"And you are looking as solemn as an owl, Mr. Clive, and the *role* don't suit you at all!" she says with a shrug.

"Oh!"

"Colonel Belgrave is very nice. I love admiration, flattery, homage, and, man of the world as he is, he likes to humour a girl's vanity."

"You vain little puss!"

"I confess to being vain. Wiser women than I am suffer from chronic vanity."

"What are you going to do next? (Going to stay here?)"

"Yes, I'll stay here until somebody takes me down to supper."

"I intend to take you down to supper—unless somebody has a prior claim."

"No, nobody hasn't. You're the first offer, so I shall accept it," and Rubie arises from the couch and puts her white arms through his.

"Let us go out on the balcony and look at the stars," Bertie suggests, as he moves towards the French window.

"What a night for star-gazing, to be sure. Go out on the balcony in evening dress, with twenty inches of snow under foot?"

"Get a wrap."

"Don't know where to find one."

"If you tell me where to find it, I shall go and fetch it."

"Let us wait a moment, here comes ma."

"Rubie, your papa has just had a letter from his agent. It contains good news. He has let the house on the Cliff at last!"

"And do you consider that good news, mamma?" Rubie asks, with a little shrug of disappointment.

"Certainly; he has written to say that he has let the House on the Cliff at last. In winter, too; how strange!"

"Oh, that's jolly, ma. We shall have a new neighbour when we go back to Lynn Royale!"

"The new tenant is a lady—a lady of means and rank. Mr. Whillon is not quite sure that she is not a foreigner!"

"So much the better. It will be jolly to have a lady neighbour. Another guest for our Christmas parties, ma!"

"My dear, the lady is an invalid, and has taken the House on the Cliff for sake of the repose and seclusion for which it is recommended."

"Oh, ma! I'm afraid I'll break in on her seclusion as soon as I get back to Lynn Royale!" Rubie said, laughing in her gay, thoughtless way.

"No, no, my dear Rubie. You must respect the feeling and motives of others. How do we know what secret or what sorrow has driven this unknown woman to the seclusion of that lonely, luckless House on the Cliff!"

"How luckless, Lady Royale?" Bertie asks, smiling cynically.

"Why, it has been always on our hands; it never will let. The few times we found a tenant for it they saw some excuse for getting out of it as quickly as possible. I don't expect to be more fortunate with our new tenant. I am pleased to hear that the house is let at last. Rubie, here is your new friend, Colonel Belgrave, just arrived. He is looking about for us. Will you come with me?"

"Not now, mamma. I have promised Bertie to go on the balcony with him. I'll have my name entered in the black books if I disappoint him."

"Miss Royale is at liberty to join Colonel Belgrave. I have neither the will nor the power to control her actions!" and bowing

with courtly grace, he turned on his heel and walk ed away.

The smiles vanished from her mouth, her red lips parted and puckered into an angry pout. It grieved her to see such a display of temper on the part of this her most favoured suitor. She was an arrant flirt, and would like to play off Colonel Belgrave, the handsome, dashing man of the world, against Bertie Clive's truth and devotion. But the game was too dangerous, the young Guardsman was so hot-headed and jealous.

Just at this moment she is suffering from a bad fit of remorse. She is thinking it all out, and knows that she has been very bad to him. She loves him unreservedly, and offends him ruthlessly. Then she has to make concessions, and act "humble pie," as she calls it.

Tears rush to her eyes, but she must keep them back at any sacrifice.

She hurried out of the glare of the light, and stood by one of the windows. Lifting the blind she looked up at the wintry stars. She would like to go outside and breathe the fresh air, but she had no wrap, and the night was chilly one in early winter.

How will she meet Bertie Clive in order to effect a reconciliation? she thinks as she lingers near the window. Presently a hand is laid gently on her shoulder, and turning she beheld Colonel Belgrave!

## CHAPTER II.

### A FLIRT.

Rubie's heart gave a bound under her fashionable bodice of silver tissue lace and pink roses.

This man exercises such a strange influence over her. She admires him so much; she loves Bertie Clive, she tells herself. But Bertie is so jealous, she dare not encourage the Colonel by word or look.

That the latter admires her is a fact patent to all who care to notice it. She must dispense with one of them. But which? Surely not Bertie, whom she has loved so long, and who is her acknowledged fiancé?

There is such a contrast between the two men—Clive, youthful, tall, handsome, rich and with a prospective baronetcy looming in the future, and Caton Belgrave, more than twenty years his senior, and a *blond* man of the world. A noble face, close-shaven, with the exception of a thick, tawny moustache on his aristocratic upper lip, while his smooth, close-cut hair is turning as white as snow. He has many fascinations which he knows how and when to use—fascinations young ladies are not always plucky enough to resist. Rubie he looks upon as a lovely child.

"Ah, little sweetheart, I'm so sorry I am too late to hear 'Soft, brown eyes.' A little bird whispered to me that you have been singing it!" he says, with a display of his beautiful teeth.

"Little sweetheart" was the Colonel's pet name for Rubie.

He takes her hand and strolls leisurely through the crowded room, still holding her hand.

"Here comes Colonel Belgrave; he will sing something!" cries a chorus of voices from the group standing around the piano, where a tall, spare woman in short curls and spectacles is delighting her audience with "Tis only a pale primrose."

"Ah, Colonel Belgrave will oblige when Mrs. Streatham has finished," and the gentleman is almost carried away from Rubie's side, and pushed towards the piano by a pretty, plump, fair young matron, whose rosy lips, small, white teeth, and big grey eyes all smile up in his face.

"You will forgive me, Rubie, dear, for my rudeness? But it is so very seldom that we can persuade Colonel Belgrave to sing, and it is such a rare treat when we succeed, that we are amply repaid for our trouble."

"I haven't pluck enough to ask him," says Rubie, with a timid look at the speaker.

"Why, my dear, you seem to be quite shy of the handsome Colonel!"

Rubie's blue eyes glance round the room and settle upon a tall, little figure leaning listlessly against a console at the farthest end of the drawing-room, while the dark, restless eyes are fixed in a vacant stare on the crowd round the piano.

"Well, Mrs. Lumley, I always feel very small and insignificant in the presence of Colonel Belgrave," Rubie says, deprecatingly.

"Well, he's a character in his way, you know. There is some secret hidden away beneath that grave exterior. That cold, unsmiling face is a mask. There is a turned down page in his life, unfolding some great disappointment, some great sorrow. You say you feel small and insignificant in his presence, yet, I assure you, Rubie dear, you are the only one of your sex he ever smiles upon. Not because he is smitten with you. He is not in love with you. Oh, no! Your hot temper amuses him, your delightful simplicity charms him, he fondles and pets you like a beautiful, wilful child. But he will never fall in love with you or anybody else. He has loved and lost, I can tell. He is still a bachelor, at which people wonder. He is proof against the charms of women, and mamma with marriageable daughters are giving him up in despair."

"But, Mrs. Lumley—"

"Hush—h—h!"

The grand piano, touched by a master hand, and the clear, rich tones of a man's voice singing is filling the luxurious room with richest melody.

Under the lilac bloom  
Is a gleam of satin and pearls.  
Love of my life I come,  
My peerless queen of girls;  
Down by the terrace steps,  
Where silvery urns shine,  
My love her tryst keeps,  
My love that is only mine!

By the gloss of tresses led  
My darling I behold,  
The pose of her dainty head,  
A dazle of sun and gold.  
Oh! love so fair and true,  
With rosy, dimpled mouth,  
Soft eyes of pansy hue,  
And breath like balm of the south;  
Where tangled roses shed  
Leaves and perfume sweet,  
Starring with white and red  
The grasses under her feet.  
Down by the terrace steps,  
Amid the sweet perfume,  
My love her tryst keeps,  
Under the lilac bloom.

Caton Belgrave's song is ended, and he leaves the piano amid the plaudits of his hearers.

Mrs. Lumley's plump figure and fair, smiling face beaming with admiration and approval stops the way.

"Thank you very much, Colonel, for your exquisite rendering of 'Under the Lilac Bloom,'" she murmurs.

"It is the exquisite rendering, not the words. They are so wretchedly frivolous," simpers another lady with an air of indifference.

But Caton Belgrave, missing Rubie from where he left her, is looking among the guests for her.

Rubie did not wait to hear Caton Belgrave sing, but hurried away in search of a wrap, and, having found a white woollen shawl, she went in search of Bertie Clive.

She soon found him, engaged in a mild flirtation with a Miss Snaffles, a very tall, angular young lady of uncertain age, with very prominent features, and a pretty pink and white complexion.

This young lady was conspicuous for her



orange-colour hair, of which she had an abundance.

"Bertie, are we going on the balcony now?" she asks timidly.

"Ah, are you tired of Colonel Belgrave's little pleasanties? Does he bore you, Miss Royale?"

"Oh, no. I never tire of the Colonel's conversation. He never bores me. I left him at the piano; he was singing when I came away."

Miss Snaffles crept away as soon as the slim figure in silver tissue came on the scene.

"Oh, Rubie, how you like to torture me. Don't I wish the Geographical Society would appoint Caton Belgrave to go out and investigate the North Pole, and wouldn't I be glad to hear that he lost himself when he got there?"

"Don't be absurd, Bert."

"Er—it will come to an end next week."

"What will come to an end?"

"This flirtation with Belgrave."

"I object to your calling my friendship for Colonel Belgrave a flirtation!" Rubie says pointedly.

"My mind will be relieved when you leave town for Lynn Royale."

"You don't mind condemning me to the solitude of Lynn Royale?"

"Cultivate your new neighbour."

"Suppose she is old, ugly, ill-tempered; suppose she lectures me and asks me to distribute tracts and soup-tickets, and makes herself otherwise disagreeable?"

"Well, she'd be better than nobody at that."

"Are you coming down before Christmas, Bert?"

"Not before, dear. You know why, Rubie."

"You will spend Christmas with your mother, isn't that it, Bert?"

"Yes. She is very feeble. Her troubles have been very great. Only she is such a confirmed invalid I would ask you to accompany me."

"I'll go with you to your mother, if you like."

"Do you mean it? Er—then Caton Belgrave will not be a guest at Lynn Royale, or you would not be so willing to give up his society for that of an old woman!"

"But he will be a guest at Lynn Royale. Mamma has given him an invite."

"No. Oh, Rubie, I put my veto on that. Then when I join you on New Year's Eve, Colonel Belgrave may have supplanted me in every particular."

"He will not."

"How am I to guard against him?"

"By trusting me implicitly, Bertie."

"And believing that you won't flirt? I—er—must try; but instead of running down to Sussex on New Year's Eve I shall go on the twenty-seventh of December."

"That will be delightful. We'll have more time to lay plans for our New Year's party, and the first time I call at the House on the Cliff I shall send you a word picture of the new tenant."

"That's settled, Rubie. Now let us go out on the balcony and look at the stars. See the new moon peeping at you from behind that stack of chimneys yonder? There is not much sky to see, Rubie, but when we gaze at it together it becomes romantic. There's the white-faced moon against a background of dark tempestuous sky, and surrounded by white stars that look like snow-white petals in the blue."

The West-end mansion of the Royales is closed. The blinds are down at all the windows, as if in mourning, and Sir John and Lady Royale and Miss Royale, with their servants and horses, and dogs, Angora cat and canaries have migrated from the West-end desert of London to the fine old family seat, Lynn Royale, in Sussex, where the baronet and his lady and charming daughter intend to entertain a large number of distinguished guests, besides the county families, in right royal fashion during the Christmas holidays.

A few weeks of the quiet of Lynn Royale was enough for Lady Royale and Rubie. They were tired of it all—tired of the whirlwind of brown leaves that deluged them wherever they went.

Towards the end of September Bertie Clive received a letter from Rubie in which the following passage occurred:—

"DEAR BERTIE,—I am sorry I cannot send you word portrait of Mrs. L'Orme, papa's new tenant, according to promise, but the lady has not yet arrived here. The place is full of work people, as papa is having it all done up. He is sparing no expense. So all I know about the new tenant is her name—Mrs. L'Orme. I am tired of Lynn Royale. We are all tired of it. I'm afraid mamma will have chronic ennui. She is so wretched. I am tired of seeing great drifts of dead leaves in my path wherever I go, and I am tired of hearing the constant wail of the birds bemoaning the departed summer. So we are going to Paris until December, hoping to get rid of this depression in that very lively capital."

### CHAPTER III.

AT LYNN ROYALE.

In the first week of December Captain Clive found a letter from Rubie awaiting him at his club. The only passage in that letter likely to interest the reader of these pages is the following:—

"Back again at Lynn Royale. It seems more endurable now that winter is really set in, and not the fog end of the summer, or the late autumn days when everybody seems so indescribably miserable. Our new tenant, Mrs. L'Orme, is here. It seems to me that she has been with us always, that I cannot recall the commencement of our friendship, and, Bertie, I cannot describe her. I wish you were here to see her. The most glowing description, the most extravagant flattery, fails to exaggerate in describing Marie L'Orme's beauty. You must come to Lynn Royale and see for yourself. And now, Bertie, I must tell you something that will please you. Ma has just heard that your old *blle noir* is expected in England from Vienna, I mean Colonel Belgrave. He will be sure to run down to Lynn Royale as soon as possible after his arrival in London. So you will be very likely to meet him here, and, my dear Bert, you must keep your temper."

The days pass swiftly and pleasantly at Lynn Royale. Time does not hang heavily on their hands. There were so many county families spending Christmas in their country houses that they were enabled to keep up a constant round of festivities.

For centuries the Royales of Lynn Royale had been famous for their hospitality, and the present baronet and his charming wife and daughter are not likely to ever degenerate from the old-time customs.

At Yule-tide the Royales of Lynn Royale kept open house to all. When the wintry blast blow sharp and chill across the dreary downs, sweeping the snow-clouds against the salt breeze blowing up from the lashing waters of the Channel, the well-lighted windows of Lynn Royale are to the weary traveller, or the benighted tramp, as the lighthouse beacon is to the tempest-tossed mariner on a stormy sea.

There is a dinner party at Lynn Royale, and the old house is lit up from roof to basement, while a golden radiance pours through the uncurtained windows of the ball-room, the wine-red blinds in the other windows give a crimson tint to the far-reaching, snow-laden land.

Within all is light and warmth, beauty and luxury, the buzz of conversation, the ripple of laughter, the refrain of a sweet song.

Mrs. L'Orme is a guest at Lynn Royale. She has been a constant visitor at the house of the Royales since the return of the ladies from Paris.

Rubie's description of her did not really do her justice. She is dressed in black velvet, and the effect of the shining, glossy velvet against the polished whiteness of her neck and shoulders is startling.

Lady Royale had been quite captivated by her at first, but after a very short acquaintance, she began to mistrust the beautiful and fascinating widow.

There was something beneath the surface, not visible to a careless observer, that caused the Lady of Lynn Royale to be suspicious. Not so Rubie, who could not see beneath the ivory-tinted, ivory-smooth skin, or the piquant, smiling face.

Rubie was fascinated, and head over ears in love with Marie L'Orme's beauty as any young Sussex squire among them.

As for Marie L'Orme's beauty, the poet, the painter might immortalise her, but they could not reproduce the grace of her form the ever-changing witcheries of her face, the ever-varying lights and shadows in her passionate, dark eyes, that, when in anger, had gleams of orange in their flashing depths. Her cheeks were colourless, but smooth and white as alabaster. She has vivid scarlet lips, and wondrous hair, black and abundant, and twisted softly into great piled up-coils on the top of her head.

If the charming widow is not a favourite with the hostess her host's kindness, attention and admiration amply compensates her for the loss of Lady Royale's favour.

Sir John seems to be so deeply impressed by his new tenant as to be quite oblivious of the presence of all others, even his wife and daughter. And Rubie noticed, with much pain, that her mother had undergone a great change. She is no longer the smiling, pleasant-faced lady of a few weeks ago—that grave, relict woman who moves about so silently. Rubie has noticed the change, and is grieved beyond expression.

As she watches her mother's furtive glance turn from the face of her guest to that of her husband the conviction dawns upon her that her father is unduly attentive to his fair tenant, and that the latter is not indifferent to those attentions.

On becoming convinced of this, she sought her mother directly. She attempted to console her, but her advice or endearments made very little impression. Lady Royale pined in secret.

For three days Lady Royale and Rubie have watched Mrs. L'Orme flirt with the baronet, and use every artifice to attract his attention.

Sir John admired her immensely. She saw her power, and exercised it to the utmost.

Rubie was broken-hearted. She adored her father. She knew that he was not a very wise parent, but he was a dear, good-natured one; that was why Marie L'Orme got him in her toils so easily.

Rubie did not like to mention the subject to her father. The subject was out of her province altogether; but she could not let her mother pine and die under this new horror—her husband's neglect, and Mrs. L'Orme's treachery. On the night of the dinner party he accompanied the fair widow home in her own brougham. On reaching the lodge entrance to the House on the Cliff the lady got out, and gave her coachman orders to drive Sir John back to Lynn Royale.

Rubie and her mother sat up until he arrived. Rubie made up her mind she would have a scene with her father the very next morning. She would beard the lion in his den.

The next morning Rubie met her father at breakfast. He greeted her affectionately, but he was absent-minded and reserved. Rubie heard him give orders to his groom that his horse, Rover, was to be brought round to the hall door at half-past ten.

"I know where you are going this morning, papa!" she observed with a saucy air.

"Do you really? My dear little girl knows where I'm going to, does she?"

"Yes, papa dear, and I want you to change your mind and not go there at all!"

"Impossible, child!"

"Not for mamma's sake, pa?"

"In what way will my visit to Mrs. L'Orme affect your mamma?" he asks sheepishly.

"Mamma is very ill this morning, and not able to come down to breakfast!"

"Not able to—come down—to breakfast, Rubie?"

"Yes, pa."

"You are exaggerating, Rubie. Acknowledge it, and I'll forgive you!"

"Nothing of the kind, pa. Ma is breaking her heart! You will see all the mischief you are doing when it is too late. Promise me not to go and see Mrs. L'Orme any more!"

"I am going to see your mother now, child. Let me see. I think I had better keep my promise and call upon Mrs. C. Orme first. She will expect me."

The baronet spoke more to himself than to Ruby.

"No, no, papa, you must not, you must not!" the girl cries, wringing her hands excitedly.

"And why not? Why do you upset yourself about my promised visit to Mrs. L'Orme?"

"A telegram for you, Miss Rubie," a footman says, as he holds a silver salver bearing the yellow envelope towards her.

"Who is it from? London I can see, and it's from Bert, and he is coming the day after Christmas. I dare say Colonel Belgrave will come to our New Year's party, and we'll be able to have a high old time. But where's pa? Why, he has escaped while I have been looking at Bert's telegram. He has gone to the House on the Cliff. I hope she won't come to our New Year's party. And how about mamma. If she's not better, we won't have much pleasure. Oh, my dear Aggie, is it you? I'm so pleased to see you!" Rubie says, effusively, as she embraces a pretty, fashionably-dressed girl, who rushed into her arms and kissed her with much gush.

"Dear old Rubie, what are you looking so serious for? Has Captain Clive wired to say he is not coming?"

"Oh, Aggie, I'm in such trouble. I'm afraid mamma is going to be ill!" Rubie says, pathetically, two great tears rolling down her cheeks.

"My dear, dear Rubie, what makes you think so?"

"Oh, yes, I must tell. I'll be glad when Bert comes to Lynn Royale. I won't be so lonesome then. You know how all the men admire Mrs. L'Orme up at Cliff House, don't you, Aggie?"

"Yes. She's just splendid, you know. Even Charlie is smitten with her. He can think or speak of nothing else. It does annoy me!"

"I think she's a very wicked woman. Papa seems to be her last victim. He follows her like a poodle wherever she goes. Mamma has noticed his infatuation, and the discovery has made her ill!"

"Don't be down-hearted, Rubie. It is nothing. Sir John admires women who are handsome and dashing. Mrs. L'Orme is very beautiful, and distinguished looking. If she only smiles on any of the men they go off their head forthwith. It is not all her fault."

"I shall never like her again!" sobs Rubie, as she wipes the tears from her eyes.

"Oh, nonsense! She is very well, as long as she don't entice our lovers away. Don't let her have an opportunity of practising her spells and witcheries upon Captain Clive. She has fairly bewitched Charlie Holden!"

"I am grieving for mamma, not for myself or Bert!"

"I hope Lady Royale will think better of it. I don't think there is anything to grieve about. Surely her ladyship's pale face and low spirits ought to touch your father's heart. I cannot believe that he means anything by his attentions to the lady on the Cliff."

"I hope not, and I wish mamma would rally, and not notice Mrs. L'Orme!"

"I shall, my dear Rubie, I shall rally, and I shall not notice Mrs. L'Orme any more. I shall not let her see that her conduct affects

either my health or spirits," says Lady Royale, as she entered the room with a swish of silken skirts.

She was arrayed in one of her most exquisitely made gowns, a perfect work of art. Her earrings, brooch and bracelet were a late gift of Sir John's. A posy of choice hothouse flowers nestled among the soft lace on her bosom. Her soft light hair was gathered high upon her head, and coiled.

Paler than usual, and with a look of unrest in her eyes; but her smile was as bright and her voice as pleasant, and her manner as genial, as they were before she doubted her husband's truth.

"Perhaps she is happy when she makes hearts ache," Aggie observes.

"Let's go to-morrow to the House on the Cliff. She won't expect us. Let us find her unawares, and see how she will receive us. Will you come, Aggie?"

"Oh, yes; dear Lady Royale, I'll go."

"And, Rubie, she certainly monopolises my husband wherever we go. What her designs or motives are I cannot say, but we hear and read of such strange incidents, such wicked intrigues, such awful crimes, that it makes one timid of strangers, and doubtful even of our friends."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW TENANT.

THERE had been a heavy fall of snow in the night and early morning. The dead silence that marks the presence of deep snow pervaded the dull, cold December atmosphere.

The ladies at Lynn Royale could not venture out in such weather. The roads and paths are hidden, and the snow drifts are deep and treacherous, so they intended to pass the day putting up Christmas decorations instead of going out. The two girls, Rubie and Miss Aggie Wilson, had known each other all their lives. Rubie was born at Lynn Royale, and Aggie was born about four miles away, her father being the rector of the parish, and Aggie the only daughter among a houseful of sons. She is pretty, vivacious, stylish, and spoilt. She is staying with her friend Rubie to assist with the preparations for Christmas and New Year's festivals. So the three weather-bound ladies found life endurable while making the old house beautiful. Sir John, on finding that he could not venture out, became very irritable and restless under his enforced confinement, and was very glad when the day came to an end.

The next day was no better; the snow still lay in great mounds, and the trees looked like tall, white wraiths with arms outstretched. More guests arrived at Lynn Royale. There is a very merry party gathered in the old-fashioned oak-panelled rooms, while outside the lights from the windows and glass doors send broad streams of radiance across the snow-covered downs. Sir John, who had been absent three hours, returned at about ten o'clock, in very good spirits. Lady Royale heaved a sigh as she saw her husband enter the drawing-room, but she avoided him, and by making a circuitous route through the room she went out unnoticed, and ten minutes later might be seen waiting at the end of a long passage leading to the stables. She had sent a maidservant to summon Sir John's groom. Presently the maid returned, followed by the baronet's elderly groom, who touched his hat to the lady.

"I want to ask you a question or two, Warren, and remember you are not to repeat them to anybody. Where did you drive Sir John to this afternoon?"

"To the Cliff, my lady. Sir John dined with the lady as I led the house, me lady."

"Did he dine at Mrs. L'Orme's?"

"Yes, me lady."

"Was there any more company?"

"Two other gentlemen dined there, me lady."

"That will do, Warren," and putting a sover-

sign into his hand, the lady turned and walked away.

"He has been to Cliff House. He is in the toils of the sorceress. She has stolen my husband from me. Yes—yes, and I must bear it—must wear a smiling face to hide an aching heart!"

A spasm of pain passed over the handsome, pleasant face of Lady Royale. She paused at the drawing-room door, with the handle in her hand, having taken two minutes to smooth her face and her laces. She turns the handle and enters the room, her eyes bright, and her face beaming with smiles. She saw her husband and her daughter Rubie at a little distance. They are *vis à-vis* on two chairs, Rubie leaning forward with a pleading look in her blue eyes, and the baronet with an expression of annoyance in his usually kind, brown eyes. Seeing her mother enter, Rubie stood up and went to meet her ladyship.

"I am so pleased, mamma, to see you looking so cheerful. I hope you are forgetting that silly affair about Mrs. L'Orme. I was speaking to pa about it, and he says that there is nothing in it. He likes Mrs. L'Orme for something that reminds him of somebody he knew years ago."

"Ha! ha! How romantic. He dined with her to-day. Perhaps they discussed the past together; she might be his first sweetheart who so cruelly jilted him for somebody else," her ladyship says sarcastically, as she takes her place at the piano.

Mr. Wilson, the rector, approached smiling benignly on his most honoured parishioner.

"My dear Lady Royale, I am quite pleased to see you at the piano, as it proves that you are better," the good clergyman says in an oily tone, as he watches the jewelled fingers glide over the keys.

"Appearance is not to be always trusted, Mr. Wilson. I am not much better, though I am sitting here."

"I am sorry to hear that, Lady Royale," Mr. Wilson says, gravely.

She swept the keys swiftly and commenced playing an old and favourite tune, singing the words in a voice of thrilling sweetness.

O, love, do you remember

That Yule-tide long ago,

Its merry bright December,

Its holly and mistletoe,

The music and the dancing,

The flirting and the folly,

And the waltz round the room

Under mistletoe and holly?

O, what a wreath you wove me

Of holly berries bright,

And what sweet things you whisper'd

In my willing ear that night.

Then life was all enchantment,

Spiced with love and folly,

When we waltzed round the room

Under mistletoe and holly.

But time has seared our faces,

And bleached our hair to snow

Since we sang duets together

That Yule-tide long ago.

We are older grown—and wiser

And smile at youth and folly

Since we waltz'd round the room

Under mistletoe and holly.

When the applause that followed this song had subsided Mr. Wilson remarks casually,—

"By the bye, Lady Royale, I miss one familiar face and figure. You know who I mean?"

"Do you mean Mrs. L'Orme?"

"I do."

"I did not send her an invitation. Mrs. L'Orme will be at our New Year's party. She had the invite a week ago," the lady says, in such a bitter tone that the good rector looked greatly surprised, but he did not press her for the explanation she did not vouchsafe.

After a short pause the lady remarked,—

"Our Christmas party is only a family reunion of our relations, and a few of our oldest and nearest neighbours, and our oldest and choicest friends."



On Boxing Day, as the 2.30 p.m. train from London is steaming into the little country station about five miles from Lynn Royale, a pony phaeton driven by our beautiful and exceedingly interesting young friend Miss Royale of Lynn Royale swept in gallant style around a bend in the road and drew up in very good form at the entrance to the station.

Miss Rubie looks very pretty in her seal-skin and cables, her large hat turned up at the back, that shows off her glittering hair, twisted round and round in a coil of plaited gold.

Throwing the reins to the fashionable groom, who is holding the ponies' heads, Rubie leaps lightly from the phaeton, and, passing through the station, went right through to the platform.

She is there to meet her lover, who is expected to come by this train from London.

It is easy to distinguish that tall lithe figure from all others. Rubie can see him above the heads of the crowd as he makes his way towards her.

"What! all alone, Rubie? What a brave little woman it is."

"Why, that is five miles to drive a phaeton, that you should make such a fuss about it?"

"What! through such weather as this, such bitter cold, and such deep snow. Where is Miss Wilson?"

"Agg is gone out to visit the sick poor for her pa, and mamma is not very well, and papa is—"

"Well, where is papa?" he inquires, as he takes the reins, and settles himself under a pile of rugs and leopard skins.

"Papa was gone to Cliff House before I left home."

"What does he go there for, Rubie?"

"To visit Mrs. L'Orme, and he goes there pretty often too, I can tell you."

"Does he, really. He must be quite spoony on Mrs. L'Orme," he says, as he gives the ponies their heads, and they start away through the snow.

"You haven't improved, dear girl, since I saw you last. You are thinner, paler, more depressed and reserved. Your face has grown smaller, and your eyes larger. What troubles you, Rubie?"

"I worry about mamma."

"But you mustn't worry, Rubie. You mustn't spoil your looks, you know!"

Bertie and Rubie arrived at Lynn Royale in due course, where the young soldier was received very warmly by the fair hostess and her guests, all of whom regarded the dashing young guardsman as one of the family.

The next morning Rubie proposed to drive over to the House on the Cliff, escorted by Bertie Clive, to pay a visit of courtesy to Mrs. L'Orme, and "we mustn't treat her with hauteur or reserve. She must not even suspect that we have noticed her influence over papa. So I must be civil to her," were Rubie's parting words to her mother, as she followed Clive out to where the phaeton stood, half buried in snow.

"O, what a day. I would not venture up the Cliff on such a day, but I am so anxious to hear what you think of the lady of Cliff House."

"Er—r. From what I hear of her she is a general favourite. Suppose I fall in love with her, Rubie?"

"Suppose you do, sir. You will only be another victim!"

"And you?"

"O, I can spare you," she says, with a flash and a pout, as she gives one of the ponies a smart out of the whip.

It is a weary drive through the deep snow that lay in great heaps on the narrow rugged road leading to the Cliff, a huge mountain of rock, that towers black and rugged, the top breaking off in many peaks that frowned in grim grandeur above the English Channel.

Half-way up this natural bulwark Sir John Royale had built a pretty cottage with

picturesque roof and gables, windows and chimneys.

The cliffs were on Sir John's land, and the cottage was intended for a pleasant retreat for his own family, and was beautifully and artistically decorated, while the exterior was covered with ivy, American cressers, jasmine, and roses bloomed and trailed, making it a fair picture in the summer months.

In some places the creepers hung fresh and green from the granite peaks above, where the sea birds swarmed, and the wild waters of the Channel lashed the rock-bound coast. Trees, shrubs, and flowers grew in abundance in the spring, summer, and autumn.

The cottage was built in a sheltered nook, the lofty peaks soaring above it, protecting it alike from the fierce blast that blew down from the hills, and the salt sea-breeze that blew up from the Channel.

Shortly after the Cottage was complete Lady Royale took an unaccountable dislike to it, and declared her resolution never to set foot in it again.

It was then the baronet thought of letting it; but it was to let a long time before any applicant made an offer for the House on the Cliff, and when they did they had a great many faults to find.

Those with children would not take it because it was too dangerous. One false step on the zig-zag path might precipitate them down the rough granite rocks, where a hundred sharp peaks would be protruding to receive them. The unmarried would not take it because it was so isolated, so desolate.

At last there appeared an applicant who required seclusion, isolation, a lady just returned from the Continent.

All the necessary forms and explanation being gone through, Mrs. L'Orme came from London and took possession of the House on the Cliff in due course.

A few days later, when the baronet and his wife called upon Mrs. L'Orme, they found the new tenant a very different sort of person to what they expected.

Her ladyship had pictured Mrs. L'Orme as a middle-aged lady, fairly well off if not rich, a woman who had known troubles in the world, from which she fled in disgust and sought to hide them in that lonely House on the Cliff. But when the baronet's wife saw the resplendent creature that received her, her surprise was almost past description. Then followed the discovery of Mrs. L'Orme's intimacy with the baronet, and all the unpleasantness and regrets that followed such painful discoveries.

Just where the zig-zag path commenced that wound upwards to Mrs. L'Orme's cottage stood a small brick house in the centre of an old-fashioned garden. Sir John Royale's herdsman lived in the pretty red-brick house that was shut in from the high road by a thick box and wild rose hedge, and sheltered on the other side by the high sea wall that enclosed it from the waves that lashed beyond. Before this cottage Rubie drew the reins and stopped the ponies.

"We must leave the carriage here," Rubie says, as Bertie Clive takes his place beside her and they commence toiling up the rugged path from which every particle of snow had been swept. After much toil, and puffing and blowing, the pair reach the first level space that, like the landing on a staircase, breaks the upward journey. So they again start forward up the second portion of this natural staircase, and again they reach a landing and breathing place.

"My dear little Rubie, what could possess you to come out on such a day as this? Come in doors quick—out of the cold, and snow." The words were uttered in a low, silvery voice, that might belong to a girl of fifteen or a woman of forty. Standing on the top step was a tall, slim figure, and a lovely, dusky face, small and vivacious, a face rich in colouring, with brilliant, dark eyes, the whole face, lips and eyes smiling radiantly, yet changing ever—a face with all the piquant loveliness of a girl,

and all the fire of a woman's passionate nature, a figure with the slim waist of girlhood, and the rounded bust of womanhood.

"It is Mrs. L'Orme," cries Rubie, bounding forward and clasping her arms around the lady of Cliff Cottage, forgetting all her prejudices and dislike.

Mrs. L'Orme returned the girl's caresses.

"Your lover?" she whispers as she presses her hot, red lips to the girl's fair cheek.

"Introduce me, dear."

"Come here, Bertie, and let me introduce you to Mrs. L'Orme."

Rubie introduced her fiancé in quite good form to this woman with the evil repute of winning and playing with men's hearts as carelessly as though they were straws, and Rubie's heart misgave her as she saw the way Bertie's eyes followed her every movement. Was she wrong in bringing her affianced husband here?

"Why, my dear, pretty little Rubie, what are you thinking of? Mr. Clive, is your little fiancé always as serious as this? What is my pretty Rubie dreaming of? Tell me, dear." The girl looks up with startled eyes.

"I am only thinking how lonely it must be for you here, how awful to sit in this pretty room and look out at that terrible sea rolling and tossing and bursting with rage, at its own ineffectual efforts to swallow up mankind, and the world he lives in."

"And what may Mr. Clive's thoughts be? I am not a thought reader, you know, or I would be able to read yours. Do tell us, Mr. Clive," she says, looking at him through the half drooping lashes, and with a soft languor in her great black eyes.

"I am thinking of you, madam," he answers, in an absent way, as if unconscious of the presence of Rubie.

"Of me? Then your thoughts are not worth much, *mon cher!*" she says, smilingly, and with a side glance at Rubie and a sudden flash of her languishing black eyes.

"Why don't you come and stay with me, dear, and help to brighten the weary hours? I sit watching those furious waters with no other companion than the last novel."

"The sight would drive me crazy. That is why mamma cannot endure the Cliff. The constant sigh and lash of the waves is even worse than the sight of their fury."

Rubie's soft, blue eyes, with a shade of sadness dimming their lustre, turns a reproachful glance on Captain Clive, but he is not aware that she looks at him, for he has eyes for nobody else in the world but the woman he never saw before to-day.

"You will stay to luncheon, my pair of turtle doves. It is a most unexpected pleasure to have your company to-day. I so seldom have company."

"Don't papa count as company when he comes? He hardly ever lunches at home, now," Rubie says, with charming frankness, and in perfect innocence.

Mrs. L'Orme had a habit of clasping and unclasping her hands, no doubt to display their perfect shape and the valuable rings that adorned them. As the girl spoke Mrs. L'Orme was in the act of folding her hands, and Rubie noticed that she pressed them together until the gems in her rings left white marks on her fingers, and her upper front teeth sank deep into her red under lip.

"Oh yes, dear! Sir John has been kind enough to call upon me daily since I've been here. Just a moment, dear. You will excuse me while I give some directions about the luncheon. It is laid in my boudoir, as I thought Sir John might call to-day."

"Papa is gone to London to-day," Rubie answers with an air of hauteur. She had noticed a touch of malice and vexation in Mrs. L'Orme's voice as she glided from the room. Then Rubie turned to Bertie.

"Well, sir, you seem very much gone on the new mistress of Cliff House. And—I believe she's a very wicked woman."

"Er—what do you mean, Rubie?" he inquires, a dazed look in his eyes.

"Why, my dear Bertie, you are under a spell since you entered this room. The spell of the enchantress. Speak before she returns. The sight of her will certainly send you off again. Is it her big, black eyes, or her raven colour hair, or her scarlet lips, that fascinate you?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Rubie. Er—I admire Mrs.—ah, what's her name—immensely. She's the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

"You are complimentary, sir."

"Well—er—I don't call you a woman, you know. You are an awfully pretty girl, Rubie, but the mistress of Cliff House is a beautiful woman."

"What a nice distinction you make, Captain Clive. Don't try to deceive me, sir. You are in love with Mrs. L'Orme, for how long I cannot say. Will you be good enough to tell me before she returns whether you intend to stay to luncheon?"

"I think so. Won't you?"

"I must, if you do. I cannot go home by myself."

"Then we'll stay, Rubie. I suppose her lunches are as dainty and as delicious as herself."

"And mind you sit with your back to the light, and you may be able to see where the crow's feet intend to come in Mrs. L'Orme's face. I know where to look for crow's feet when the time comes."

"By Jove! Talking about crow's feet at seventeen!"

"Hush—h! Here comes the enchantress."

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE TOILS.

THE door opened, and Mrs. L'Orme entered, looking more charming than before she went out. She had given a few touches to her dress. She had re-arranged the great pile of blue-black hair at the top of her graceful head, and she had re-arranged the short, wilful curls that cluster about her low, broad forehead.

"Come, my children," and taking a hand of each she led them from the room.

Outside was a long carpeted passage. Having led her guests a little way along this passage, she pushed a door open, and the transit was astounding. If the apartment they had just left was filled with the cold, grey, dull daylight, the room they just entered was radiant with a pale rose-colour light. The effect was charming. The beautiful room was a marvel of artistic taste. It is resplendent with fruit and flowers; everything is rich and artistic.

"The daylight never enters here," the hostess explained. "You see, dear," she says, drawing the long damask aside from the window—"you see that black wall of granite; it shuts out the daylight, but it shuts out the storm also. Now sit down and enjoy your luncheon; I always do. A good luncheon always puts me in good humour; then a cozy little dinner, and a delicious little supper, followed by a real La Ferme cigarette, a small bottle of Moselle and another of Chartreuse; this is my idea of enjoyment by my own fireside. With these comforts I am supremely happy. There are other luxuries I have not named that are all necessary to make life worth living."

She placed chairs for her guests as she spoke, and they sat down.

Rubie was awed by the luxury of this boudoir apartment. The seacoal fire burning so brightly in the low steel grate, the soft, yielding carpet, rugs and tiger skins; the mirrors and oil paintings in their gilded frames and the plentiful array of hot-house flowers, the glass, china and statuary. The luncheon so temptingly arranged, and the tall lamps with their artistic shades, filling the room with that delicate rosy light. Rubie's blue eyes glanced round wonderingly.

"Who was this woman, and how did she

become possessed of such costly surroundings?" she asked herself.

Glancing inquiringly at Bertie she saw his eyes fastened on Mrs. L'Orme's face almost unconscious of her (Rubie's) presence, unconscious of everything except the beautiful profile upon which he gazed so earnestly, while the handsome hostess, all unconscious of his attention, seemed too intent on the contents of her plate to take any notice of this latest votary at her shrine.

Rubie's heart sank within her, and a cold hand seemed to clutch her heart. A great lump came in her throat, and a mist of tears dimmed her eyes. She let her head droop, and tries to fix her attention on her plate, her delicate cheeks flushed with indignation, but the rose light of the lamps conceals her heightened colour. She resolves to take her leave as soon after luncheon as politeness permits.

After luncheon Rubie moved to the centre table and opened an album, and turns the portraits over one after the other, some plain, some handsome, but all strange. At last she paused to look at the portrait of a man; a bold, handsome, audacious, high-bred face. As Rubie gazes the face grows more familiar. Where had she seen it before?

"Bertie, who is this?" holding the album before him.

Bertie does not hear until Rubie repeats her question.

"Look at this portrait, Bert; do you recognize it?"

She stood behind Captain Clive's chair, holding the album in a position that gave him a good view of the portrait.

"That is a photo of a very old, old friend," Mrs. L'Orme says, as she glances at the bright manly face.

Rubie noticed her hostess looked embarrassed at her question; her crimson lips were puckered tightly, and her brilliant dark eyes snapped viciously.

"Oh, I have it! Don't you think it looks wonderfully like the Colonel, only this face has no whiskers, no moustache, no beard, but about the eyes and forehead. Look, Bert! But I daresay this was taken years ago, and the Colonel is so much older now."

"By Jove, Rubie! you have just hit it. That face is so like the Colonel's, you can see the likeness though the face is clean shaven!"

"You know somebody who resembles that portrait?" Mrs. L'Orme observes, in a voice that trembles with suppressed emotion.

"Yes," draws Captain Clive. "It resembles a very intimate friend of ours. Quite a jolly good fellow, I can tell you!"

"You will meet him at Lynn Royale when you come over on New Year's Eve. The likeness is very striking!"

Rubie, not wishing to notice the agitation of her hostess, stands examining the curios on a side table. A sparkle of gems caught her eye. Laying down the china monster she was inspecting, her busy white fingers quickly drew forth the glittering object with an exclamation of surprise and admiration. It was an exquisitely made dagger about six inches long, the blade of finest steel, the sheath of gold fretwork, and the hilt, a cross in form, was encrusted with precious stones of every colour and tint, that gleamed and burned like dull fire.

"What an exquisite and costly toy!" Rubie thinks, as she draws the glittering blade from the sheath and pushes it back.

"One might wear it as an ornament at a fancy ball, but it would be a dangerous ornament for any hot-tempered person to carry about."

She lays it back where she found it, and, turning, saw Mrs. L'Orme, sitting in a low chair, cutting the leaves of a society journal, her head drooping very low.

Bertie Clive having caught sight of her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, stole to her side, and bending until his brown curls mingle with her jet black tresses, and his lips

almost touch her diamond earring, whispers something in the shell-colour ear.

"I am going, Bertie. Mamma will wonder where we have got to. She will think something has happened. Will you come, or will you stay?" She lays particular stress upon the last word.

"Er—I—ah—you are in a hurry, Rubie!" "I am thinking of mamma!" Rubie says, loftily.

"I—er—suppose I must go, then!" he says, with a tender look at the beautiful profile of his hostess.

"You need not—you can stay. Of course I shall have to take the carriage."

"And drive through the snow, along that dangerous road by yourself? Oh, no, Rubie!"

"I have the groom. He is somebody," she answers, scornfully. She walks out of the room, and returns to that in which Mrs. L'Orme had at first received her.

A pretty maidservant, who is putting fresh coals on the fire, helps her on with her seal-skin cloak, and she has arranged her hat and long boa before Mrs. L'Orme and Bertie Clive enter the room.

"Oh, you are ready, dear!" the latter says with a forced smile, but she can see the latent anger in his eyes.

"And when shall I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Royale again?" Mrs. L'Orme adds, smilingly, and though Rubie did not see it, she felt that those two exchanged glances.

"I don't know when you will see me next, Mrs. L'Orme. I shall be busy all this week, and shall not be able to make any calls. We shall have the pleasure of seeing each other on New Year's Eve, if not before. Good-morning!"

Rubie held out her hand, barely touching the slender tip of the gem-lit fingers, then spun round and walked towards the front door, before her smiling hostess had time to kiss her, as Rubie saw she intended doing. Rubie went down the rugged path to the waiting phaeton without once looking back, Bertie lingering on the steps with Mrs. L'Orme's hand clasped in his, and his eyes devouring the beautiful, false face.

Rubie was bursting with indignation, but she tried to hide her chagrin and annoyance.

Bertie came whistling down the path; Rubie made room for him beside her, without looking at him. She kept her lips closed tightly, and her eyes averted; but she could not keep the colour from deepening in her cheeks from mortification of spirit.

Their ride was almost a silent one, Rubie making a few commonplace observations about the weather and the scenery.

As they passed through the lodge-gate at Lynn Royale he observed:

"Have you lost your tongue, little woman? You are very grave to-day." He uttered the words with a sort of sheepish giggle.

Rubie did not reply.

"Er—well—I—er—think that I am acquainted with nearly all your moods. Er—but I really never did try to imagine how you would look in a sulk. What is the matter, dear?"

"I am not prepared to explain at present, Mr. Clive!"

"Don't be cross, Rubie, because a fellow is civil to a pretty woman. But I haven't told you yet what I think of your new tenant."

"I think I can guess what you think of her. The usual game of spoons."

"Well—er—she's a perfectly beautiful woman; but I would never fall in love with her."

"But you are in love with her, *mon cher*. You know the old song,—

"You should always be off with the old love  
Before you are on with the new."

"But I don't intend to be off with the old no more than I intend being on with the new. Here we are, Rubie. Look! There's the matter on the steps looking out for us."

"I see her."



"But who is that I see standing just behind Lady Royale?"

"Why, it is—it is Caton Belgrave."

A tall, distinguished-looking man comes down the steps and waits till the phaeton stops, then goes to Rubie's side in time to assist her out before Bertie Olive could reach her.

"Well, little sweetheart, here I am at last. I haven't seen you for ages. Haven't you a salute for me?"

"Oh, Colonel Belgrave, I'm so glad you have come! It is so wretchedly dull here!"

"Wretchedly dull here?" he repeats with an amused smile, and a swift glance at Captain Olive.

He snatched her up in his strong arms and kissed her on the forehead.

"Don't be rude, Colonel Belgrave," she says with a pout, and trying to look very angry.

Bertie Olive is unable to restrain his mortification, because he knows it is deserved. Leaving the phaeton in the hands of the groom, he went up the steps to join Lady Royale, who turned and led the way to the drawing-room, and Rubie, putting her little gloved hand through Colonel Belgrave's arm, followed.

The Colonel is a fine-looking man, with a noble face and very high-bred air. He wore a thick moustache and side-whiskers, very fair in colour, while his close-cut hair is white as silver.

Though he was only about thirty-five years of age he was still a bachelor, which called forth much comment in fashionable circles.

He was known to be proof against the wiles of women, and mammas with marriageable daughters were giving him up in despair.

The Honourable Caton Belgrave was only son and heir of Viscount Lydon, and colonel of a crack regiment.

He had known Rubie from a baby, and amused, petted and indulged her, and the big, handsome trooper had always been a favourite with the fair Rubie.

At sight of him now all traces of vexation, jealousy and mortification vanished. A flush of pleasure chased the angry red from her face.

She would turn the tables on Bertie Olive, she told herself. He might flirt with Mrs. L'Orme, she would flirt with Caton Belgrave.

They were inseparable that evening. Rubie confided all her troubles, doubts and fears to her old friend. She told him of the new tenant of Cliff House, of her father's infatuation and constant visits to the handsome stranger, and the power she exercised over him.

She told him of her fears that Bertie had also fallen into the toils of the siren, describing the effect her presence had upon him. She described Mrs. L'Orme, and more than once was surprised at his excitement, and the startled look in his eyes as he listened to her.

"Is Mrs. L'Orme dark or fair?" he asks, suddenly.

"Oh, very dark!"

"Tall and slender, and very graceful; an oval face, and olive complexion; wonderful black hair, eyes, brows, and lashes."

"Your description is correct. You certainly must know this fascinating widow. She has in her album the portrait of a gentleman that bears a most striking resemblance to you," Rubie says, laughing merrily at his grave face.

"We'll see."

## CHAPTER VI.

WHO IS SHE?

A thaw set in that evening, and by next morning the snow had nearly disappeared. The white winding sheet is slipping away from the brown, barren downs, and the skeleton trees stand out black and bare against the leaden sky; but at last the sun comes out and shines brilliantly on all.

Colonel Belgrave offers to accompany Rubie on a shopping trip to the few houses styled "the village," but the road is so dreadfully muddy that Rubie proposes to order the phaeton; but when she sends the order to the coachman that functionary waits upon his young lady to inform her that Sir John had ordered the phaeton two hours earlier, and that he had driven away at ten o'clock that morning with Jinks, the groom. They went in the direction of Cliff House.

"Then I shall walk!" Rubie says, laughing gaily and trying to hide the annoyance she felt at her father's unwarrantable conduct.

"And so also shall I. I must go, it only to protect you!" returns Colonel Belgrave.

So, arrayed in velvet and sable, Rubie and the Colonel start on their route to the small, pretty village that is situated just one mile from the lodge-gates of Lynn Royale.

Rubie and her friend step out bravely, and soon her rich skirts are bespattered with black mud.

In the miniature High-street is one large house of business. They sell drapery, chemistry, grocery, ironmongery, stationery, besides being the local post-office.

Miss Royale required a few trifles at the soft goods counter. Having procured them, she was about to leave the shop on her return journey, when she was much surprised to see her mother's phaeton stop before the door.

Her father and his favourite dog were in the carriage.

Sir John looked very happy, as though he was at peace with all the world.

"Rubie, my dear child, is it possible that you are here on foot such a dreadful day, and with Colonel Belgrave, too? When did you arrive, sir?"

"Only yesterday, Sir John."

"You will find it rather slow on the Sussex coast just now, though the West-end of London is not very lively. You could not be spared from Belgrave if it were. Well, Rubie, what are you going to do. Going to get in here alongside your dad, little woman?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Royale had better get in the phaeton and go home with you; the roads are so bad."

"And you?"

Oh, I'll go back to Lynn Royale as I left it, on foot. I'll tramp it," he says with a little, laugh at Rubie.

"No—no, Belgrave. Get up with James. It will be better than to be left to plod nearly two miles through the puddle," Sir John says in a friendly way to the Colonel.

"Ah! do, Caton. Sit with James. The road is dreadful!" Miss Royale supplements from under the coil of her thick white bonnet that completely muffles her back hair and pretty red mouth.

Sir John cracks his whip, and gives the ponies their heads, and the phaeton rattles along the stony road, scattering slush in all directions.

The cold is intense.

Rubie is restless. She shares a large tiger skin with her father, and the way that tiger skin is laid across her lap does not seem to suit her. She shakes it out and smooths it down—much to the annoyance of Sir John. One vigorous shake causes something to fall out of the tiger-skin. Rubie pounced upon it.

"Look, pa," she exclaims, holding a handsome cigarette-case up before Sir John.

"I—I say Rubie, child, where did you get that?"

"Just found it in the carriage, pa. I saw it before, and I know to whom it belongs," she says with a wicked side glance at him.

"Who? Tell me."

"Mrs. L'Orme."

"And when did you see Mrs. L'Orme?"

"Yesterday, at Cliff House. We had luncheon with her, and she smoked cigarettes from that case after luncheon. I admired it very much."

"Well, granted that it is Mrs. L'Orme's, just fancy a woman like her buried in that lonely house with only servants to speak to!

I feel for her so much that I took her for a drive to-day. Was that wrong?" he blurts out in an angry tone.

"Yes, pa; considering that mamma is pining in loneliness at home, and you do not think of taking her for a drive. You even take her phaeton away to accommodate this stranger who shuts herself up in the House on the Cliff for some mysterious reason or other," Rubie answers, blantly.

"Your mother never wants to go out so much as Mrs. L'Orme. She hasn't the life, energy, or physical power, nor brain power of Mrs. L'Orme."

"Then she shouldn't shut herself up in the lonely House on the Cliff."

"You don't know, Rubie, what her reasons are."

"No, papa. Thereby hangs a tale."

"It is none of our business, my girl."

"Anything that affects mamma is my business, and I know that she has not been happy since Mrs. L'Orme came to live on the cliff!" Rubie retorts, with a pout.

"Will you allow me to look at that cigarette-case?" and Colonel Belgrave holds his hand out to Miss Royale for the pretty trifle she was turning over with the utmost scorn.

The young lady placed it in his hand in silence.

"You will return the case to Mrs. L'Orme, will you not?" the Baronet said anxiously to his daughter.

"Certainly, papa; perhaps to-morrow; though as the day after to-morrow will be New Year's Eve I shall hardly have time to call. Colonel Belgrave is staring at that case as though he recognised it."

"Well, I do recognise it. I had exactly such a case about eight years ago. I bought it in Paris, and I gave it to somebody who was very dear to me at the time, but who proved very worthless, and disappeared from society altogether."

He handed the cigarette-case back to Rubie, and folding his arms across his chest, sat with his hat pushed over his eyes in stern silence until the carriage stopped before the portico at Lynn Royale.

A frost has set in after the thaw. The sky is clear and blue, the air keen, and the slush left by the melted snow is dry and crisp under foot; long crystal pendants hang from the trees, and great crystal drops spangle the shrubberies at Lynn Royale.

It is New Year's Eve. Such a rare, old-fashioned New Year's Eve. The snow still covers the hillsides; but it has thawed in the valleys and on the plains. The clear, sharp air is quite bracing.

Miss Royale is very busy helping with the decorations, and very gay they have made the grim old house; what with the great piles of evergreens and flowers, and the holly and mistletoe, they will have a merry yuletide.

Mounted on the tall steps, arranging some home flowers around a post, wrapped in a rich crimson morning-gown, Rubie is taking a very active part in the work of decoration.

"My dear Rubie, can you hear me for one moment? I don't like to interrupt you."

"Certainly, Caton. But you look so dreadfully serious. Has anything happened?"

"No; but listen, dear. Have you returned that cigarette-case to the lady of Cliff House, because if not I wish you would let me have it to take to the lady. I could apologise for you not returning it yourself, as you are too busy to call."

"But Mrs. L'Orme will be here to-night."

"But I want to see her, if possible, first."

"You can have the case, I don't want it. Please hand me that bunch of laurel. Thanks," as she came swiftly down the steps, jumping from the third step to the carpet.

"Now you want this cigarette-case, don't you?"

"Yes, little sweetheart; and then I'll be off, and won't trouble you again to-day. If the owner of this cigarette-case should happen

to be the lady it recalls to my mind there will be a scene. If we should meet unexpectedly to-night under the wax-lights there would be a scene," he says, with a stern face and tightly-compressed lips.

"How solemn you look, Caton. Take care, you may be the next victim. You will not go on for ever without falling in love!"

"Well, ta-ta, little sweetheart. I will not see you again until you have your war-paint on to-night."

But Rubie did not observe the grey pallor of the set, stern face, or the peculiar smile on the thin, straight lips.

"Poor Caton! He must have loved some girl some time or other. That case reminds him of somebody he either loved or hated long ago. But I hate women who smoke cigarettes. Fancy a woman with a cigarette-case!"

She was about to ascend the steps with an armful of flowers and evergreens, when a voice behind caused her to pause and look round. She saw a footman holding a silver salver towards her, on which lay a visiting card. On the card was the name of "Mrs. L'Orme, Cliff House."

"Why, good gracious, Tibbs! Didn't I tell you that I wasn't at home to anybody?"

"So I told the lady, Miss Rubie, but it was no use. She said you wouldn't mind her. So she insisted on me taking her card, and she—but here comes the lady, Miss Rubie."

Walking down the long drawing-room, picking her way through a litter of flowers and evergreens, holly and mistletoe, and moving with the air of an empress, Mrs. L'Orme advanced towards her, arrayed in gleaming black velvet that fell in shining folds around her. She wore a small jet bonnet with a cluster of blood-red flowers on top, and a bunch of the same bright blooms was fastened on her bosom, her big black eyes and small white teeth flash viciously, and a wicked smile curves her scarlet lips.

Rubie lays down her armful of evergreens, her cheeks flushing with vexation at the woman's audacity in pushing her way in, and finding her in *déshabillé*.

"My dear little Rubie, don't mind me. I knew exactly how I should find you. Sir John told me all about it. Your rooms will look charming. I have brought you a few wax flowers. They are on the hall table in a paper parcel."

"And did you carry them here, Mrs. L'Orme?"

"Yes, dear; I don't mind that."

"I am so sorry you should do such a thing for me. Oh, I am sorry!" Rubie says, in great distress, as she looks awe-stricken at the queenly form before her.

"You dear sensitive little pet!" Mrs. L'Orme says, gushingly, as she kisses Rubie on the forehead.

"I am much obliged to you for the flowers."

"Don't speak about them, child. And don't let me interrupt you. I am going now."

"Are you really going?"

"Yes, dear. But, Rubie, dear, you remember turning over that album a day or two ago? You remember the portrait of a gentleman friend of mine? You remarked to Mr. Clive that it resembled some gentleman you both knew."

"Yes, yes."

"Now, do you mind telling me the name of your friend? You called him the Colonel on that occasion."

"He is one of papa's oldest friends. His name is Belgrave—Colonel Caton Belgrave. Good heavens! What is the matter, Mrs. L'Orme?"

The lady had fallen with a moan of mortal anguish among the laurels and other evergreens on the floor. Rubie screamed, and two or three men-servants who were helping with the decorations hurried to the spot, and lifted the stricken woman, and laid her on a couch. Water and smelling salts were freely used, and she soon revived.

"Oh, dear. Whatever could overcome me so?"

At that moment Bertie Clive sauntered into the room in search of Rubie. At sight of Mrs. L'Orme on the couch he became quite excited, and glared suspiciously at poor Rubie, who was white with terror.

"What does it mean, Rubie, Mrs. L'Orme here in a fainting condition? Somebody must have upset her. Do you know anything about it?"

"I do not," the girl answers, with the utmost scorn, as she turns her back on him.

"It is nothing, Mr. Clive. Thank you very much for your solicitude. Good morning." She held out her hand to Bertie.

"Are you going?" he asks.

"Yes. Will you be kind enough to walk as far as the door with me?" addressing Bertie.

"You don't seem able to walk home."

"Oh, yes I am."

"I will order the brougham, if you like?"

"Thank you; no. I prefer walking."

"I will see you home, Mrs. L'Orme," suggests Bertie.

"Thank you. If you don't mind walking part of the way I shall be pleased."

"It won't take me more than two minutes to get ready," the youthful lover answers, as he darts off to make the necessary preparations.

"My dear Rubie, what were we talking about just now before I was taken bad?" Mrs. L'Orme inquires with an anxious ring in her voice as soon as the young man had disappeared.

"We were talking of Colonel Belgrave. I was going to tell you that he had not left the room five minutes when you entered it."

"Is he here then, staying?"

"Staying—yes, on a visit."

"Will he be at the ball to-night?"

"Certainly, that's what he came down from London for!"

"Oh!"

"You will probably meet him. He intended to call at Cliff House."

"He call at Cliff House!"

"Yes. I found your cigarette-case in the pony phaeton yesterday, and Colonel Belgrave seemed to recognise it, and asked me to permit him to return it to you. He seemed very anxious to see the owner of that cigarette-case," Rubie says with a touch of malice in her voice.

## CHAPTER VII.

### NEW YEAR'S EVE.

"An, here is Mr. Clive, how good you are to me. Good-bye, *ma chère*, I hope you will be very happy. Let me give you one bit of advice. Don't ever lose your heart to Caton Belgrave."

"There is no danger of that. He always treats me as a child. I have known him all my life," Miss Royale says in an aggrieved tone.

Mrs. L'Orme tried to smile in her old way, but failed. She tried to smile though her face and lips were grey with terror, or some other terrible emotion. Though her eye-lids quivered and her steps faltered, she would not give in, but held herself up bravely. She went slowly down the portico steps to where Bertie Clive was waiting for her, his long overcoat buttoned up to his chin.

Mrs. L'Orme does not look back, but Bertie lifts his hat to Rubie as she stands in the portico, then drawing the lady's arm through his, they walk down the drive, and were soon lost in the grey shadows of the dark December day.

"I hope you will be very happy," is the wish of her who tries to undermine my happiness by her treachery. The designing hypocrite! Men rave about her wonderful beauty, her jet black hair, and dusky eyes, and those full scarlet lips of hers, but the men don't care how wicked she is or what evil legend is hid away in her past. There's Bertie Clive com-

pletely infatuated, Caton Belgrave will be the next. But no. I fancy he met her before. I think that there is something gone wrong between them. How pale she turned when I mentioned his name, and her fall was not an accident, as she pretends. She came here to-day on purpose to ask the name of the man that photo resembles. The wax flowers are only an excuse. As for Bertie Clive—ah well, he may go. He is but a weak and fickle lover to be so easily won away by that woman's jet black locks. They are more powerful than the moon-light tresses he so much admired.

"Ah, Ponto, dear old doggie, how are you? Oh, you want me to go out, do you? I'm too busy, Ponto. Not to-day, dear old fellow. To-morrow we'll go for a nice walk. We'll go by the sea, where you can chase the gulls from the rocks, old Ponto. Come upstairs and stay with me while I dress!"

The huge black mastiff looked up at his young mistress with his beautiful, soft brown eyes, and wagged his great tail good-humouredly as he followed the fair girl up to her dressing-room, where the first thing she did was to have a good cry over the fallacy of friendship, and the fickleness of love.

Three hours later Lynn Royale is illuminated from roof to basement. Every window is lit up, casting long streams of radiance across the barren landscape, and turning the old house into a great beacon, that guides the weary, benighted traveller across the desolate moorland to its hospitable doors.

As the winter day closed in, carriages followed each other up the long serpentine avenue, and deposited their freight of beauty and fashion, then moved in single file to the stable-yard, for the guests who came to Lynn Royale on the last night of the old year always stayed until the first smiles of the infant year lightened their homeward way.

Mirth and music, song and laughter ring through the old rooms. The yule-logs blaze and roar up the yawning chimneys.

There is revelry also in the servants' hall. The coachmen and grooms belonging to the different carriages are entertained by the domestics at Lynn Royale. The air reeks with the odour of hot negus and spiced ale.

Lovely as a dream, the daughter of the house and her friend, Aggie Wilson, are the centre of an admiring crowd of the younger scions of the local gentry.

Rubie and Miss Wilson look well together, each is a foil to the other. Rubie with her creamy skin and pale gold hair, and Aggie, a pretty brunette with wavy, dark brown hair, soft brown eyes with long dark lashes, pale olive complexion, two bright pink spots in her cheeks and soft red lips.

Rubie wore pale blue and silver, a diamond necklace and bracelets, while the hair-pins that held back her fair tresses had large diamond stars for heads. The colour of her dress, her ornaments, her pale, silky hair and lovely sea-shell tinted complexion gives her quite a spiritual appearance.

Not all the mirth and music, splendour and gaiety can rouse Rubie from the deep dejection that has fallen upon her.

Miss Wilson, pretty and vivacious, looks charming in pale pink, lustrous silk, and cream lace.

Aggie Wilson has several younger brothers and sisters, and her father is not rich. She cannot afford such costly jewellery or rich dresses as her more fortunate friend, but she looks very winsome to-night in her pink silk and cream lace with a necklace of great pearls encircling her long, smooth throat, and strands of pearls twining through her dark hair.

"Miss Royale does not seem her own bright self to-night," one curled darling observes in an aside to Aggie.

"No, she does not. My dear Rubie, let us get away from these people. Let us sit down in some quiet place, and you can tell me your trouble before the dancing commences. Come along, dear!"

Poor little Rubie suffers herself to be led to



an alcove, where a low lounge, covered with crimson velvet, looked very inviting. The two girls sat down side by side, and Aggie passed her arm round Rubie's slender waist.

"Now, dear, tell me what makes you so sad to-night, when you ought to be happy?"

"I cannot tell you. All the evening there has been so many about. But oh, it is dreadful, Aggie! I am sure that I shall have to give up Bertie Clive."

"Give up Bertie Clive—altogether?"

"Yes. He is in love with Mrs. L'Orme. Oh! Aggie, what shall I do? He is continually insulting me by his coolness and indifference, or by holding up Mrs. L'Orme as a model of some style or accomplishment, or an example of some virtue that I do not possess."

Rubie's fair head dropped in her hands.

"My poor little Rubie, you must not be cast down, or let Captain Clive see that you are grieved at his behaviour! Men are conceited enough as it is. Just fancy him alighting my poor little Rubie for that big, black-eyed woman at Cliff House."

"Oh! Aggie, don't let me sit here any longer, and don't pity me, or I shall break down and have a good cry. I find it very hard to keep the tears back. If I cry I shall have to go upstairs and not come down again to-night. Here comes mamma!"

"Lady Royale don't look so well. She has grown pale and thin. Don't you think so, dear?"

"It's worry. Pa has changed so!" And she frets. "Oh, Aggie, dear, how fickle men are!"

"My dear Rubie, what is the matter? You have been weeping; your eyes are swollen and have red rims round them. Have you had a tiff with Bertie?" Lady Royale says, cheerily.

"Well, I think I may say I've had a tiff with him. I think Bertie and I will have to part!"

"Nonsense, child, lover's quarrels are nothing. They are soon patched up again."

"Not ours; but I am glad to see you so cheerful, dear mamma. Is papa here?" Rubie asks, wistfully.

"Yes, he is. And oh, Rubie dear, he has seen the error of his ways, and has vowed never again to pay any attention, beyond the most formal politeness, to the lady who has caused all my grief and mortification!"

"Oh, has he really, ma?" Rubie asks, with an exclamation of surprise. Then she has transferred her affections to Bertie Clive!

"Is it possible? Bertie has just brought a message to me from her, begging to be excused from coming here to-night, as she has been taken very ill to-day and is not able to come to the ball to-night."

"She called here to-day, mamma, and was taken ill in the drawing-room. Bert went home with her, and seemed quite indifferent whether I noticed his behaviour or cared!"

"You don't say so, dear. She is a most artful and designing woman; but if Mr. Clive has taken a fancy to her, your papa will soon disenchant him. I understand that one or two of our gentlemen guests met her to-day on her way here, and recognised her—saw her at some Continental gambling-places, Monte Carlo, Baden, or Monaco. Many of her adorers are disenchanted. Ah! here comes your fickle lover; he looks rather sheepish. Cheer up, Rubie, dear, don't let him see you wear the willow!"

"Well, Mr. Clive, the attraction must be very great that could keep you away from our New Year's ball till this time of night. I hope you enjoyed yourself!" her ladyship says laughingly, but with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"I have already explained to your Ladyship why I could not possibly come earlier!" he answers, with a flush of vexation. "Are you going to give me this dance, Rubie?" he adds, in a softer tone, looking down at the averted face of his fiancée.

"No; the next is Colonel Belgrave, and the

second is Lord Wallbrook," the young lady answers, coldly.

"And who comes next after Wallbrook?"

"The Honourable Tom Stopford. Then Colonel Belgrave again!"

"You have not kept any dances for me!"

"You were not here to claim them!" she answers haughtily.

"Is Belgrave here?"

"Yes; he has been dancing with Miss Wilson. Here he comes."

"Really, Miss Royale, you are quite a dazzling vision to-night. I never saw you look so lovely. I come to claim you for this dance. Do not look like that, Clive! I'm privileged, you know!"

Catching Rubie's hand he whirled her away. She glanced back smilingly at Bertie.

"You shall have the next, Bert. Lord Wallbrook can wait."

"One moment, Rubie. Let me tell you; I went to Cliff House to-day, but Mrs. L'Orme was out," Colonel Belgrave whispers.

"She called here!"

"Ah, well, I missed her. But I really believe she is the owner of that cigarette-case. I shall call again to-morrow morning. If she is the woman I suspect her to be, we shall have a stormy meeting!"

"I think she knows you, Caton. Well, the dancers are standing up. There goes the band."

"Come along, my queen!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE dancing was at its height at Lynn Royale just before the clocks struck twelve. At ten minutes before midnight the dancing ceased, and the guests followed Sir John Royale into the long drawing-room. The wine-red, silken curtains were drawn back from the long French windows, and the company grouped behind the Baronet waiting for the clocks to strike the hour of midnight. The old church bells in the village had rung the old year out, and in a few minutes more the same old bells will ring the New Year in.

Just as the clocks were striking and the bells ringing a merry welcome to the infant year the lady of Cliff House stood inside the Gothic window of her sitting-room—that very room in which Bertie Clive beheld her for the first time—the window that looked far away across the troubled waters of the Channel.

Outside that window some hardy trees and shrubs had been planted. A smooth path, out through the sharp black granite, led a little way down, ending in a dark, gruesome grotto. From this grotto to the verge of the sea the interminable rocks and sharp, murderous peaks slope downwards to the rough shingles beneath.

The sea is very wild to-night; great mountains of water roll and tumble, crowned by great ridges of seething, snow-white foam, that rolled and heaved under the frosty white stars this New Year's morn.

All through the small hours, while sounds of music and revelry made the rafters ring at Lynn Royale, did Mrs. L'Orme pace up and down her luxurious room that faced the sea.

The fire burned out, and she did not replenish it.

The fires in her heart and brain burnt too fiercely to permit her to notice the fire in the grate.

Up and down, up and down the long room, her handsome brows contracted with fury, her splendid black eyes flashing yellow gleams of measureless rage, while her vivid, scarlet lips are curled and curved in the most intense scorn.

Her marvellous black hair falls in great natural waves about her shoulders. The jet black mass had never been submitted to the torture of being arranged by a fashionable hairdresser.

Pacing by the window, she gazed in silence out at the wild, rebellious sea, and thought how typical of herself it was. She clasped her

white hands till the gems on her fingers sunk into the flesh.

"And this is New Year's Day. Oh Heavens! how I remember that other New Year's Day, when I stood before the altar in the old church with one who turned out to be the greatest scoundrel on earth. Three times have I been married, yet my life has been an empty one. It is coming near the close, I feel it—I know it. And now here is that wretch Belgrave crosses my path again. Oh Heavens! am I never to know peace? He has ferreted me out and all my secrets, and now he will throw them in my face, and render me powerless by the proofs he will bring forward to confound and ruin me."

She walked to a buffet, poured out a glass of brandy, and swallowed it at a mouthful. To and fro again, with clasped hands and burning cheeks.

"Married at sixteen to a brute, from whom I had to separate. Cursed with beauty—marvellous beauty—before I was seventeen I was the decoy of a gambling hell. I led men to their ruin. Youths under twenty sank into the lowest depths of crime to satisfy my greed for gold. Among my victims was a Russian prince. He loved me, I know that, but I did not return his love. He had a fierce, rebellious, revengeful nature. I left the place for him, and was the companion of his tour through the cities of Europe. If I say that we enjoyed ourselves to the very utmost it will hardly convey an idea of what my life has been."

"At Monte Carlo we met Belgrave. From the first moment we looked into each others eyes we loved. Prince Michiel Scobalobaki knew I hated himself, and loved the English officer; but the prince did not want to lose me, so he proposed to marry me in order to secure me. As his wife I could not have anything to say to Belgrave, so we were married according to the rights of the Greek church."

"The ceremony took place at the Russian Embassy. A week later Belgrave met me by appointment for the last time. We were to take a last farewell of each other. The meeting and the parting were most affectionate. At the last moment, as we stood with clasped hands, gazing into each others eyes, Prince Michiel came upon the scene. His fury was indescribable. He caught hold of me and flung me from him, and I fell insensible on the floor. My husband did not speak to Belgrave, he stood pointing to the door in an attitude of the utmost scorn till he passed out. From that hour to this I have never seen Scobalobaki. To Belgrave I represented that I had not been married to Prince Michiel. He believed me, and married me himself as a safeguard against the Russian bear who had deserted me."

"Poor Belgrave! he soon found to his cost what a bad bargain I was. The curse of beauty, and love of flattery and admiration clung to me through all my vicissitudes. Flattery was still the wine of life to me, as it is now. Even the love of Belgrave could not save me from myself. He suspected me, and had me watched until he had enough evidence against me to entitle him to a divorce; but he discovered that I had deceived him, and that I was really married to Prince Michiel Scobalobaki, so he left me, as he said I had no claim on him. Six months ago, at Monaco, when my funds were getting rather low, I escaped utter ruin by winning largely from Prince Michiel's elder brother, Prince Nicholas."

"His Highness was not aware that I was his sister-in-law, but he swore to be revenged upon me, even as his brother swore two years before. By advertisement I found this quiet, out-of-the-way retreat to hide my head in, for they are both hunting me down. But even here, on this wild part of the Sussex coast, I cannot have peace. Even here, with the waste of waters before me, and a mountain of rock behind, Nemesis, in the shape of Caton Belgrave, has found me. Oh, it is hard! Oh, it is hard! Will Fate never cease to perse-

cute me? I have a foreshadowing of coming evil. I cannot conquer the dreadful feeling."

She clasped her hands above her head, and cast herself on a long ottoman, with her face buried in the silken cushion.

In that posture she lay perfectly still for nearly half-an-hour, and then turned over with a sigh of bitterest anguish, fixed her large black eyes on the ceiling.

She did not move for nearly an hour, then the white lids and curled black lashes drooped slowly over the brilliant eyes, and she slept.

It is a lovely New Year's day, the sun shines brightly, pouring a flood of warm light on the frozen earth. The waters of the Channel lash furiously, but the sun tips the foam-crested ridges with gold.

The guests at Lynn Royale slept late, even to Rubie. It was eleven o'clock when she entered the morning-room, but only Colonel Belgrave was there before her.

"Good morning, Rubie! I am glad you are come. Of your charity give me a cup of coffee. I am going out."

"So early?" the girl says as she rings for coffee.

"Yes; I've had letters from town that oblige me to run up to-day, but I am determined to see Mrs. L'Orme before I go, if possible."

"I wouldn't trouble about her if I were you; some evil may come of it."

"I am going to Cliff House, Rubie. I shall be back to luncheon, then off to London."

"Oh! Caton, I hope no harm will come to you," she says, wistfully, as she hands him the coffee.

Up at Cliff House the winter sunshine is brighter than at Lynn Royale; it shines through the æthiotic window curtains of that pretty room that faces the Channell.

Royally beautiful, in a rich robe of crimson plush that falls around her fine figure in smooth, glossy folds, Mrs. L'Orme is seated in a low chair by the bright, sea-coal fire that burns in the low, shining grate. Her face shows no trace of the fierce passions that swept her troubled soul last night. She is too clever an expert in the use of cosmetics to show faded cheeks or hollow eyes. She knew that Colonel Belgrave was at Lynn Royale. She had a presentiment that he would find her out and visit her. So she was dressed to receive him, as she would have to dress every day while he was in the neighbourhood.

Reaching out her hand she took a cigarette from a china vase on the mantelpiece, placed it between her dainty white teeth, lit it with a wax match, and began to smoke.

"The cigarette-case that he gave me in Paris is lost," she muses, smilingly.

A loud ringing at the front door bell startled her. She threw her cigarette in the fire, and listened. She hears a quick step in the hall. The room door opens and her maid appears, her finger raised warningly to her mistress.

A man's tall figure looms above her. He catches the lady's maid by the arm and thrusts her out of the room, and shuts the door.

Mrs. L'Orme screams and shudders.

"Caton Belgrave—you here!"

"Marion Sackville—you here! What evil deed have you done that I find you in hiding here on the lonely Sussex coast. You must not commerce your devil's tricks here, you know!"

"It is no affair of yours, Caton Belgrave. You have no claim on me. Why do you hunt me down?" she cries, passionately.

"That you may not ruin other lives as you did mine!"

"I am not your wife. You cast me off when you found that I was really married to the Russian Prince!"

"Prince Michiel was never your husband, Marion Sackville!"

"Why do you call me Marion Sackville?"

"Because your real husband, George Sackville, is still alive!"

"George Sackville alive? That brute!"

"He is a convict at Toulon, and as his time has nearly expired he will be on your track in a few months. The Russian does not know that!"

They were both so excited now that neither heard the loud rat-tat at the outward door, nor the tone of command in a man's voice with a foreign accent, ordering Mrs. L'Orme's servants to tell him in what part of the house that lady was to be found; not until the room door was pushed open, and a handsome, distinguished-looking man stepped in.

He did not remove his hat, and he wore a long, heavy cloak, with a high collar of Russian sable, turned up about his ears, and having a long cape to it that covered his hands and arms.

"Again, and for the last time, I find you two together. And so—I pay my debt to both!"

He draws his hands from under his cape. Each holds a revolver. He raises them to a level with the two faces before him, and fires. There are two flashes—a shriek, a groan, and the crash of two falling bodies.

The terrified servants rushed in, and found the room filled with smoke, and a man and woman lying on the carpet, each shot through the head!

The murderer escaped. Who he was, or where he came from, or his motive for committing the double crime was never discovered.

The terrible news reached Lynn Royale at noon, and threw its inmates into the direst consternation.

Festivities were at once stopped, the guests departed, and the Royales returned to town. But in a few short months, when Easter held forth the promise of spring, there were greater rejoicings than ever at the old mansion; and Bert and Rubie, after all their trials, were united in a tie which made the rest of their lives one long dream of happiness!

[THE END.]

## FACETIÆ.

"WHY do you call Brown an old duck?" "Well, he takes to water now more than he used to." "Oh, I see. He's swan off."

SAID A Yorkshire man who had often veered and tacked to suit his own interests: "Why, you may call mine the religion of the wheelbarrow. I goes whichever way they shove me."

THEN the little girl put her chubby hand on the old man's knee. "I see something in the fire," murmured the child. "What is it, Fannie?" and the old man looked fondly down into her pretty face. "A stick of wood," she replied, simply, and the old man got up and kicked over a chair.

A POMPOUS and opinionated man, when discussing a certain matter with a lady, exclaimed: "I know I am right, madame. I am perfectly sure that I am. I will bet my ears on it, madame." "Do you think it right to carry betting to such extreme lengths?" quietly responded the lady.

"PAR, you know something about pigs, don't you?" "A little, sir; an' troth Ol'm prepared to show it." "Very good. Then can you tell me why a pig's tail is always made with a curly-cue?" "Dade, an' I can. It's a knot he always ties in 'imself to kape his backbone from slipping out, sir."

"OH, PAPA!" exclaimed little Johnny. "I wish I had a dog like Billy Swett's. When Billy came home yesterday, he had a newspaper, and his dog met him at the station and put the paper in his pants pocket and ran home with it." "Put the newspaper in his pocket? In his mouth, I suppose." "Yes, papa, that's what I meant. His mouth is his pants pocket, isn't it—or the pocket where he pants?"

"Is that all you can give me, ma'am," pleaded the tramp, "a dipperful of water?" "Why, no, certainly not," replied the woman with the big heart. "You can have as many dipperfuls as you like."

BROWN was courting a charming widow, who turned a deaf ear to his solicitations. "The door of my heart is closed," she murmured. "But," urged Brown, "the late lamented could not certainly have carried the key away with him."

PRETTY school-teacher: "James, is 'to kiss' an active or passive verb?" James (oldest boy in class): "Both." P. S. T.: "How is that, James?" James: "Active on the part of the feller, and passive on the part of the girl."

"I WOULD like my bill paid," said a tailor to an impecunious customer. "Do you not owe anyone anything?" asked the debtor. "No, sir; I am thankful to say I do not." "Then you can afford to wait," was the answer, as the customer walked away.

PRISON WARDER (to new convict): "We assign men here to work with which they are familiar. So if you have any special line, say so, and we will start you at once." Convict (who can scarcely believe his ears): "Thanks; I can't begin too soon. I'm an aeronaut."

EVERY EVIDENCE OF IT.—Miss Gules (gazing fondly at her father through the dining-room door): "Dear me! How sad pa looks! To look at him, Mr. Rounder, you would never suspect him to be full of spirits, would you?" Mr. Rounder (critically): "Well, no, not exactly full yet, but he will be very shortly."

JODSON: "You told me Dobson had no clothes to wear." Jepson: "Well, what I told you was true." "You said he hadn't got a stitch to his back." "Well, I meant it." "Then he has got a stitch to his back." "Ha?" "Yes; he has got rheumatism. If that ain't a stitch to his back, I would like to know what is!"

"HAVE you a stylish young girl you could recommend me?" said a gentleman in an employment office. "Excuse me, sir," replied the affable manager, "but do you live in the corner house?" "Yes. Why do you ask?" "Because your wife was here only a moment ago to see if we had a tow-headed girl with a wart on her nose."

THE congregation of Lunan, in Forfarshire, had distressed the minister by the habit of sleeping in church. One day, Jamie Fraser, an idiot, was sitting in the front gallery, when many were sleeping around him. "Look," said the minister, "you see even Jamie Fraser, the idiot, does not fall asleep as so many of you are doing." Jamie, not liking to be thus designated, coolly replied, "An' I hadna been an idiot, I would have been sleeping too."

IT takes a woman to manage. Husband: "I don't feel much like taking a holiday this year. I don't see how I can afford it." Wife: "There is no need of your taking a holiday this year, dear; that can all be arranged very nicely." He: "Why, what do you mean?" She: "Why, I can run down to the seaside and up into the country for a couple of months, you know, and you can sleep at home and take your meals down town. How easy that will be!"

THE lawyer was sitting at his desk, absorbed in the preparation of a brief. So bent was he on his work that he did not hear the door as it was pushed gently open, nor see the curly head that was thrust into his office. A little mob attracted his notice, and turning, he saw a face that was streaked with recent tears, and told plainly that the little one's feelings had been hurt. "Well, my little one, did you want to see me?" "Are you a lawyer?" "Yes. What is it you want?" "I want," and there was a resolute ring in her voice, "I want a divorce from my papa, and mamma."



## SOCIETY.

THE QUEEN has promised the Dean of Winchester that she will give a statue of Edward the Confessor for the great screen now in course of renovation in the cathedral of that city.

THE spinsters of Hamilton, chaperoned by Mrs. Austine, gave a ball in the Town Hall, Hamilton, at which over 200 guests were present. The profusion of palms and shaded lights made a charming background for the many pretty dresses, and the spinsters looked well in powder and patches, their distinctive badge. The dancing to the strains of Herr Iff's band. Glasgow, was kept up with great spirit till three o'clock.

THE QUEEN keeps the forty-ninth anniversary of her wedding-day at Osborne. Her Majesty's health is usually drunk on the occasion by the Royal household, while the memory of the late Prince Consort is honoured in silence. Her Majesty sent the Emperor William two magnificent Indian vases with superb decorations, on his birthday; and the Empress Frederick gave him a very costly and quite exquisite bronze group.

THE Pythohley Ball, held in the Assembly Rooms, Daventry, was exceptionally brilliant. Amongst the company were the Marquis and Marchioness of Hertford, Lady Margaret Seymour, Lady Henley and Miss Henley, Lady Decies, Lady Eva Greville, the Hon. A. Greville, Sir Ronald and Lady Knightly, Lord Alfred Fitzroy, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Byass, Lady Mabel Bruce, Mr. Langham (the master of the Pythohley), &c.

Amongst the many lovely dresses were those worn by Lady Mabel Bruce; grey and silver tulle, with grey brocade bodice; Mrs. Greville, white satin and pearls; Mrs. Arthur Byass, pink and gold brocade, clusters of roses, and magnificent diamonds; Lady Eva Greville, in vieux rose tulle, covered with pearl sequins; Mrs. Sinclair Blacklock, black tulle powdered with jet; the Misses Burton wore—one white tulle with moss-green velvet stripes and gold; the other the same in blue and silver stripes; Mrs. Arthur James wore a beautiful white dress; Miss Dryden, mauve tulle, trimmed with violet velvet pansies; Miss Hordern, a smart, dark blue tulle, trimmed with large bunches of yellow flowers; Mrs. Frank Thornton, white and gold brocade and bunches of Parma violets; Mrs. Austin Mackenzie, black tulle, with garish splash of green. Many of the ladies carried bouquets. In addition to the supper, there was a special oyster room. The members of the hunt, of course, appeared in pink.

THE first great Court ball of the season was given at St. Petersburg on the 28th ult., when over 2,000 guests assembled at the Winter Palace. The Czar and Czarina led off the first polonaise. In the second Her Majesty danced with the Czar, and in the third with General von Schweinitz, the German Ambassador, while the Emperor had for his partner Lady Morier. In the first quadrille the Czarina danced with the Ottoman Ambassador, and in the second with Count Wolkenstein, the Austrian Ambassador. At supper the German Ambassador was seated on the right and the Turkish Ambassador on the left of Her Majesty. M. de Giers and Count Ignatieff being also among the guests at the Imperial table.

Many of the interesting gifts presented to the Queen upon the occasion of Her Jubilee have now been arranged in the handsome oak and glass cabinets provided for their reception in the Grand Vestibule at Windsor Castle. The statue of the Queen, which occupies a central position against the north wall of the apartment, has been placed under a carved oak Gothic canopy between two of the cabinets, the shelves of which are crowded with costly presents.

## STATISTICS.

OVER one hundred thousand dogs are used in smuggling along the frontier between France and Belgium.

It is said that in Italy there are eight American-born princesses, seven marchionesses, twelve countesses, and a baroness. In return, we have a host of organ-grinders.

THE number of marriages is in the proportion of 75 to every 1,000 individuals. Marriages are more frequent after equinoxes—that is, during the months of June and December.

THE tomato-tinning industry in the United States was carried last year to an unheard of degree. A pack of 3,319,437 cases of two dozens each is reported, against 2,817,048 cases for 1887, an increase of 500,000 cases. The average consumption for the past six years has been about 2,500,000 cases. Assuming, therefore, that the demand for the current year will be only a normal one, there will be a surplus of from 500,000 to 800,000 cases to be carried over. Low prices stimulate consumption, however, and as prices are certain to be low, the surplus may not be so large as present figures indicate.

## GEMS.

A TRUE principle never dies.

EVERY man owes a debt to mankind.

BE the architect of your own fortune.

IN shoal water you know how deep it is.

THE most liberal are often the most successful.

Do to day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them.

We talk of immortality, but we do not even know yet what time is. Perhaps time has possibilities that dwarf immortality, and we are fooling ourselves with the poorer choice. Let us have the very best.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BAKED POTATOES.—Wash carefully potatoes of a medium size and smooth skin, and let them bake slowly.

FISH CAKES.—To one pound of boneless salt fish, cooked tender and chopped fine, add an equal quantity of mashed potato, two eggs, and one-half teaspoon of melted butter. Mix thoroughly, and drop by spoonfuls into just enough hot fat to brown them.

RICE CROQUETTES.—Boil one-half pint of rice in a quart of sweet milk or water with a little salt until soft, add half a cup of butter, two beaten eggs and a little corn meal; cut any shape desired, and drop into hot lard, or fry with a small quantity of butter or lard.

SALT CODFISH.—Boneless codfish is easiest to prepare, but the careful housewife will search even this for bones. Soak it in cold water over night, change the water in the morning, and let it boil; then set it back to keep warm, but not boil. Many prefer to add one beaten egg and a cup of milk.

PINK AND WHITE LAYER CAKE.—One cup of butter, two of sugar, one of milk, one of corn flour, two of flour, and two teaspoonfuls of baking powder sifted dry with the flour, whites of six eggs beaten stiff. Stir all together. This will make five layers, separate enough to make two layers, and add a teaspoonful of fruit juice. For filling take the whites of two eggs beaten stiff, and flavour with extract of orange; first cover a white layer with filling, and then lay on a pink layer, and cover that, and so on, frosting the top layer.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE assessment of taxes in England is said by some to date back to Ethelbert in 991; others refer it to 1522, during the reign of Henry VIII., while some authorities claim that the system originated with the Land Tax of William III., 1689. Tribute was levied upon the conquered by the conqueror from the earliest ages, but the above are the dates assigned to the origin of regular tax assessment as we now understand it.

NEITHER sex can benefit by over-exalting or lowering the other. They are meant to work together, side by side, for mutual help and comfort, each tacitly supplying the other's deficiencies, without recriminations, or discussions, as to what qualities are, or are not, possessed by either. The instant they begin to fight about their separate rights they are almost sure to forget their mutual duties, which are much more important to the conservation of society.—Mrs. D. M. Craik.

HINTS ABOUT DRESSES.—Much colour in the face necessitates a soberness of hue in the dress, while red or auburn hair looks best if its possessor is arrayed in black or dark colour. No drapery is better than scant drapery. The dress that has no pocket has a parallel in the house without a pantry. The woman who can wear anything and look well in it is the exception. Simple dresses of good material made in a becoming manner is a good rule. Dress goods should not be bought simply because they are pretty without considering their becomingness. Elderly or stout ladies should wear black almost entirely, and avoid any brilliant colouring in the trimming of bonnets. A person with but little colour in complexion or hair must supply the deficiency by having deep, rich tones in the dress material.

CURIOUS VESSELS.—On the coast of Peru each bay or landing-place has its own peculiarly constructed vessel, adapted for the surf it has to go through. Thus at Malabrigo, the fishermen have what they call "caballitos," bunches of reed tied together, and turned up at the bow like a Chilean balsa, but much higher. These are so light that they are thrown from the top of the surf to the beach, when the people jump off and carry them to their huts. But the most important and best known of these contrivances is the *balsa* (raft, Spanish), which is formed of seal skins, sewed together and inflated. Two of these bags, about eight feet in length, are fastened together at one end for a prow, and completed by small pieces of wood covered with matting sewed across. It is padded with a piece of wood with a blade at each end. It is difficult at times to launch, but will land three passengers, besides the steersman, at any time, with great facility.

KINDNESS OF WOMEN.—Among all nations, women are ever inclined to be cheerful and modest. They do not hesitate, like man, to perform a hospitable or generous action; not haughty, nor arrogant, nor supercilious, but full of courtesy and affection; industrious, economical, ingenious; more virtuous, and performing more good actions than man. I never addressed myself in the language of decency and friendship to a woman, whether civilised or savage, without receiving a decent and friendly answer. In wandering over the barren plains of inhospitable Denmark, through honest Sweden, frozen Lapland, rude and churlish Finland, unprincipled Russia, and the widespread regions of the wandering Tartar, if hungry, dry, cold, wet or sick, woman has ever been friendly to me, and uniformly so; and, to add to this virtue, so worthy the appellation of benevolence, these actions have been performed in so free and kind a manner, that, if I was dry, I drank the sweet draught, and if hungry, ate the coarse morsel with double relish.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. G. M.—Columbus was buried at Havana.  
R. C. W.—A copyright may be assigned by any instrument in writing.

MOLLY.—To become stouter partake of food containing the most starch and sugar.

M. M.—The French phrase "*au revoir*," translated freely, signifies "Adieu until we meet again."

L. A. C.—The delay complained of was doubtless due to the inability of the firm to fill their numerous orders as fast as received.

J. L.—Black Friday took place during the height of the commercial panic of 1886. It was Friday, May 12. The day was named Black Friday by the Times.

AMINA.—Before washing almost any coloured fabric, it is recommended to soak them for some time in water to every gallon of which has been added a spoonful of ox-gall.

L. S. A.—Read aloud daily, pronouncing every word slowly, clearly, and distinctly. In time you will get to be a good reader, and be free from the lip of which you complain.

V. N. C.—The koodoo is one of the largest of the antelope genus. It is found in South Africa, and measures upwards of eight feet in length. It is four feet high at the shoulder.

C. F. J.—It is a matter of custom. In cities with crowded thoroughfares gentlemen walk on either side of the ladies they are escorting, always taking care to give their companion the wall.

ELTER.—Use tripoli and water in polishing your watch barrel, as emery paper will be very apt to scratch the surface. The same mixture should be used in cleaning accoutrements.

A. B. G.—The "Plerian spring," to which Pope refers was in Pleria, an interesting part of Macedonia, because of the traditions to which it has given birth, as being the first seat of the Muses and the birth-place of Orpheus. Those who drank from the waters of Pleria were said to be inspired.

M. P. H.—Androclus was a Roman slave of the early part of the first century, of whom it is said that having fled from the tyranny of his master and been recaptured, he was sentenced to be devoured by wild beasts in the circus; but a lion which had been let loose upon him recognised him as the man who had once relieved it of a thorn in its foot, and immediately began to caress him. The Emperor ordered Androclus to be pardoned, and presented with the lion, which he used afterwards to lead about Rome.

R. R.—When a person feels satisfied that the peace and harmony of his household cannot be maintained while an objectionable member of it is enjoying his hospitality, he should immediately take active steps to remove such cause. This is a most delicate matter, when once the party has become established in the family circle, but under other circumstances—such as you quote—it is very easy to settle it once and for ever. If the mother of your intended wife gives palpable evidence of proving a stumbling-block in the path of your future happiness, by all means speak your mind boldly, and do not invite her to become a part of your prospective household.

C. R. R.—The powder of Spanish flies, another name for cantharides, is chiefly used for blistering. The flies abound in Spain, Italy, the south of France, Hungary, and Russia. They usually make their appearance in swarms upon the trees in May and June, when they are collected. Persons with their faces and hands protected shake the trees, and the insects are received as they fall upon linen cloths. They are then plunged into weak vinegar until deprived of life, and next dried and packed in boxes or casks lined with paper, ready for shipment. The Russian flies are distinguished for their greater size, and their colour approaches to that of copper. Additions are not common. Occasionally other insects are added, purposely, or through carelessness, but they are readily distinguished by their different shape or colour. They should never be purchased in powder, for in that state they may be more easily adulterated; but if so obtained, they should be kept in air-tight vessels. The better way is to have them powdered as they are wanted for use.

G. R. H.—1. Many men of the old world, famous in literature and science, have lived to an advanced age. Thus from fifty to sixty we have Tasso, Virgil, Shakespeare, Moliere, Dante, Pope, Ovid, Horace, Racine, Demosthenes; from sixty to seventy, Levasser, Salvani, Boocaccio, Fenelon, Aristotle, Cuvier, Milton, Rousseau, Erasmus, Cervantes; from seventy to eighty, Dryden, Petrarch, Linnaeus, Locke, Handel, Galileo, Swift, Roger Bacon, Charles Darwin; and from eighty to ninety, Thomas Carlyle, Young, Plato, Buffon, Goethe, Franklin, Sir W. Herschel, Newton, Voltaire, Halley. 2. The following are a few instances of extreme longevity which have been placed on record in England, though it is the general opinion that the ages of the persons named have been much exaggerated: Margaret Patten, 137; the Countess of Desmond, 145; Thomas Parr, 152; Thomas Damme, 154; John Rowin, 173; and Peter Torton, 185. The reason given for believing these ages to have been exaggerated is that they lived at a time when no accurate chronological records were kept, and when it was the habit to fix the dates of occurrences by comparing them in the memory with other events believed to have happened about the same time. Still there is no reason to doubt that the persons named lived to be upwards of a hundred years of age.

MAURINE.—The first date you mention fell on Monday, the second on Saturday, the third on Friday, the fourth on Tuesday, and the fifth on Thursday.

N. H. R.—Feudalism was in its highest power about the twelfth century. After that period the growth of the free towns began to put some check on the system.

C. C. H.—First call upon the young lady in company with a friend, and get a little better acquainted. Do not be afraid of her. You are evidently very young and inexperienced. You will get over your bashfulness in time.

D. S.—The question as to the propriety of cousins marrying is one which should be settled by the interested parties. Opinions differ widely on this subject, and it is left therefore to the good judgment of your parents and yourself.

D. S. M.—As soon as you have saved enough to begin housekeeping, and are getting a little more salary, you may safely ask the young lady to marry you. Do not be too timid. Bashfulness injures a young man in the estimation of young ladies.

E. E.—It is proper for a lady to take a gentleman's arm in the street in the evening. You cannot prevent your neighbours from commenting on your love affairs. It is natural for us all to take an interest in any development of the tender passion.

GEORGE R.—You evidently have not as much faith in woman's word about her age as a man contemplating marriage ought to have. You certainly could not learn to love a woman after you had married her that you believed had wilfully deceived you.

## HARD TO CHOOSE.

O, what is a girl to do  
Who has of lovers a score?  
Though fortune's favourite she may be,  
Her fate is one to deplore.  
And she is in doubt, I'm sure,  
And often in great distress,  
For fear she'll say No to the very one  
To whom she ought to say Yes.

Now, that is the case with me,  
And courage I surely lack;  
For I find it hard, oh, very hard,  
To decide between Jim and Jack;  
For both are so very nice,  
Yet so different in their ways,  
That I cannot tell which one I'd like  
To live with the rest of my days.

To-day I'm in love with Jack.  
In whom there's much to admire;  
To-morrow my heart for love of Jim  
Flames up like a coal of fire.  
And when they are sitting near  
I wish, just to end the strife,  
The two were rolled into one, and I  
Was the beautiful Jim-Jack's wife.

J. P.

E. A. A.—Whether it is possible or not to raise wheat from seed that has been wrapped in the coverments of Egyptian mummies for thousands of years is a question which has been revived of late in England. Mummy wheat has been repeatedly sown with success in England and on the Continent, but it was suggested that the cunning Arabs, discovering that money might be made by the fraud, put modern wheat in the grave clothes of the mummies, and that it was this modern grain, and not the wheat of ancient Egypt, which had germinated in the experiments of European agriculturists. But the latest experiments, it is said, were made with wheat which had unquestionably been buried for over two thousand years. It is said that flowers have also been raised from seeds thousands of years old.

M. M.—John Bunyan, one of the most popular religious writers of any era, was born at Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628. He was brought up to his father's trade of tinker, and spent his youth in the practice of that craft. In his sixteenth or seventeenth year he enlisted in the army, and was present at the siege of Lisle in 1645. After leaving the army he married, and in 1655 was chosen pastor of a Baptist church at Bedford. After serving for five years he was compelled to cease by the Act against conventicles, convicted and sentenced to perpetual banishment. He spent twelve years of his life in Bedford Gaol, during which time he wrote his great book "Pilgrim's Progress." After the issuance of James II.'s declaration for liberty of conscience, he again settled in Bedford and ministered to a Baptist congregation until the time of his death by fever in 1688.

E. A. C.—A man should never marry one whom he cannot respect and look up to, and if he feels that she is below him in the social scale, he should not encourage her in the thought that his ultimate object is to make her his wife, as the time is sure to come when their life will be one of constant bickering and fault-finding. In the case quoted, the girl, even though compelled by circumstances to be the servant of others, is doubtless of as noble character as those whose bidding she does, and worthy of the love of some true man, who does not consider himself so far above her as you imagine yourself to be. Taken altogether, it would be advisable to discontinue your visits and seek the company of one who more nearly approaches your self-constituted social plane. Her age will prove no barrier in the eyes of a sensible, well-meaning man, as women of twenty-seven cannot be considered "old maids" by any but inexperienced, vain specimens of mankind.

T. P. Z.—1. No limit can be fixed for the time taken up in courting, and therefore it is impossible to state how long a period should elapse before the gentleman must propose. 2. If the parties are engaged, there would be no impropriety in kissing each other "good-night."

N. V. W.—There is no impropriety in shaking hands with a gentleman who has been properly introduced to you by a friend. When a gentleman calls, he should be introduced at once to your parents, that he may tell them who he is and establish himself in their good opinion.

E. A. C. G.—The eyelashes should be clipped constantly, and the hair kept short and washed with a mixture of tincture of cantharides and sweet oil; any respectable chemist will give you the right proportions, as they vary with the amount of stimulant required for the promotion of the growth of the hair.

LOTTIE.—It is difficult to advise without knowing the size and shape of the room. The breakfast table, however, should be in the centre, and the gifts displayed to the best advantage on another near a window. This latter table, presuming the wedding gifts to be of the usual kind, might be covered with a dark table-cloth.

R. M. N.—Although the impression is very widespread that a human body is heavier after than before death, there is no ground for the belief, which probably originated from the fact that even the weakest living person clings, in some degree, to anyone who attempts to carry him, and so is more easily borne than a corpse.

R. V.—Do not marry until you can marry one whom you love. A loveless marriage is a sad affair. If you will divert your mind from a hopeless passion, you will not find it so difficult to love one whom you say is entirely worthy of you, and recommended by your mother. The stage is a poor place for a young lady without any particular gifts or training for it.

C. D. D.—Treat the subject practically. Show the difference between a man who knows how to use his eyes and one who does not. Emphasize the benefits of the habit of observation, and show how to cultivate the habit. If you have no idea how your teachers wish you to treat the subject, ask them what their wishes are in that respect before you begin to write your essay.

L. C. H.—We are surprised that any young lady of so much intelligence as you seem to possess, should pay such unsolicited attention to a stranger who, for aught you know, might have been a pickpocket. It seems, however, that he had to good taste to care for the acquaintance of a girl whom he naturally supposed could be rather too easily won to familiar acquaintanceship.

C. C.—The tenant has no right to cut down the trees unless that right is specifically given him in the lease. In legal terms such despoiling of the premises is called waste, and can readily be stopped by an appeal to the proper court. Any lawyer would know what to do in order to stop the waste. Should the tenant be so foolish as to disobey the order of the court, he could be fined and imprisoned.

DIANA.—1. A being with a natural genius for it can, but it is better to receive instructions. 2. No; to be an actress is no disgrace; but the life is full of hardship and temptation. An actress, to whom we put your question, said: "If a woman is a second 'She' it is possible, because in thousands of years she could gain wisdom, otherwise the chances are very small." Experience—that is the only profitable teacher.

W. H.—We are sorry to say that in this case there is but one thing to be done—free from temptation. Remember that a girl's good name is a priceless jewel, and the man who truly, honestly loves her will shield the object of his affection from all suffering. As the stronger one you must protect this girl from yourself, for nothing but misery can follow if she learns to love you. Be brave and honourable. Do not throw off the clinging fingers of the feeble being who once, at your request, placed her hand in yours as a token of her faith in your worthiness to lead her up the walk in life. By all means cease your visits to the one whom you have no right to love.

A. M. W.—We heartily sympathize with you in your unfortunate condition, but we do not know how we can help you to better it. When a man has once sunk so low in the scale of being as persistently to ill-treat a helpless woman whom he has solemnly sworn to love, cherish and protect, there is room for but little hope of his ever again rising to the level of true manhood. The best course for you to pursue is to strive to be the noblest woman and the best wife that you possibly can be, and commending yourself to the guidance of your Father in Heaven, leave the result to Him. In this way, some spark of manliness yet lingering in your husband's bosom may be kindled into a flame of love and duty.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 234, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. BUCK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KIDDER, 70 to 78, Long Acre, W.C.

